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THE STRUCTURAL EVOLUTION OF THE CHURCH

THE STRUCTURES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

George Mangatt

THE COUNCILS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES - A SHORT HISTORICAL SURVEY

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BOOK REVIEW: IMAGES OF MAN

J. R. Chandran

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The People of God

THE STRUCTURAL EVOLUTION OF THE CHURCH

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Editorial

This issue of *Jeevadhara* deals with the *Structural Evolution of the Church*. Students of Ecclesiology realize that a study of the structures of the Church is of great importance for any serious reform. Hence our attention is focussed on some aspects of the structures of the Church.

Hers is a complex reality of divine and human aspects. Her mission is divine and her role is among mankind. The divine and human natures of the Word Incarnate ever remain the model of the Church. She is in service of the human family to make it grow in the divine communion. Hence the Church has to be involved in the problems and prospects of human history just as the human nature of Christ was the instrument of the Divine Word.

By the structures of the Church is meant her organizational aspects which are intended for achieving a specific goal. Therefore the whole organizational structure of the Church should be fully attuned to its nature and goal. The Church which exists for the last twenty centuries assumed many structures and has undergone many influences. These have left their own marks on her. Now the Church is a highly centralized organization according to a monarchical pattern. But in Vatican II and after it, there has been an earnest attempt to make the Church less monarchical and more collegial.

In the first article George Mangatt deals with the 'Structures of the Church in the New Testament'. The early Church provides ample evidence of a rich variety of structures. The communion of the Spirit and genuine fellowship reigned supreme there. The Lord and His Spirit sustained them. They fully relied on the Divine assistance and were a praying community and their fellowship was a living reality. In the second article E. R. Hambye deals with the 'Role of Councils in the life of the Church'. The Church is a communion of individual Churches. The ecclesial relation and solidarity are well expressed in the Councils. The

Churches of God united in the Councils share their ecclesial experiences together and help each other to face the challenges posed by the ever changing situations. The councils began at the time of the Apostles and they continue all through these centuries.

In the third article Antony Thannikot explains the historical background of the process of centralization in the Church, and especially of the Roman Church. The concept of the Church as a communion of Churches gradually disappeared and the Church in the West turned into a highly centralized organization according to the monarchical pattern. To a great extent this condition continues even today. The image of the Church as a *societas perfecta* with a highly centralized juridical system often projects the human desire for power and influence rather than the self-effacing Spirit of Christ. Consequently ecclesiastical triumph and glory may not always be the triumph and glory of the Kingdom preached by Christ.

In the fourth article John B. Chethimattam analyzes the 'Process of Decentralization in the Church'. The highly centralized juridical structure has to be decentralized. The Church of Christ is far from being a man-made juridical structure which is the product of legislators. At the same time one has to admit that communion and fellowship require some kind of organization and centralization. There are different ministries in the Church. There is a variety of service but the same Spirit (Cfr I Cor. 12: 4f.). The same Spirit lives in the individuals, individual churches and universal Church.

The Church in India has a great role to play in the structural evolution of the Church. She is as old as Christianity itself but is now over-westernized in many ways. The prospects of an indigenous Church are not bright as long as the Church fails to grow in her own individuality. She had her native structure in the past, was Indian in culture, and eastern in worship. The growth and renewal of a Church need historical continuity. The future belongs to the present and the present belongs to the past. The Church's structural evolution should be the natural growth of her individuality.

The Structures of the Early Church

The Church faces today the problem of adapting its structures to the changing patterns of the contemporary situation. Restructuring of offices according to her present requirements is a serious concern of the Christian community. The need for a meaningful unity of faith in a diversity of sociological expressions is felt particularly in ecumenical endeavours.¹ A study of the gradual development of the organizational structures of the early Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit can give us insights into our task today.² Only some brief hints are given here; an exhaustive study is not possible in this short article. Only the early Church as presented by the New Testament is dealt with.

I The Jerusalem Church

We shall begin by studying the development of the organization of the Jewish Christian Church of Jerusalem, drawing our information from the Acts of the Apostles.

The Twelve

The Twelve disciples of Jesus who had witnessed his life, death and Resurrection played a decisive role in the Jerusalem Church.³ They founded it and ruled it in the beginning. In spite of their failures during Jesus' life and Passion, they spontaneously assumed, after Pentecost, the leadership of the Jerusalem community. Speaking of the pre-Pentecostal community, Acts 1: 14ff. gives the names of the eleven apostles. The importance

1. Cf. L. M. Bermejo, Rome and Canterbury on the Ministry, in: *One in Christ* 11 (1975) 145-181.

2. Cf. J. L. McKenzie, Ministerial Structures in the New Testament, in: *Concilium*, v. 4, n. 4 (1972) 13-22.

3. For a bibliography on the Twelve, see: A Lemaire, The Ministries in the New Testament, in: *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 3 (1973) 133-166.

of the group of Twelve is brought out by the New Testament which emphasizes that after Cephas (1 Cor 15: 5; Lk 24: 34) the Twelve were privileged with the appearance of the risen Lord (cf. 1 Cor 15: 5; Lk 24: 36ff; Mt 28: 16-20). Particularly significant is the fact that it was felt necessary to fill the vacancy of the traitor Judas by the election of Matthias (Act 1: 15-26). The Gospels and the Acts call the Twelve "Apostles" (Mk 6: 12; Mt 10: 2; Lk 6: 13; Acts 1: 26). Luke in the Acts of the Apostles consistently reserves this term for the leading group in Jerusalem, namely, the Twelve (cf. 1: 2: 26; 4: 35, 37; 5: 12, 18, 29). He defines an apostle as one who was with Jesus from the time of his baptism by John until his ascension. His function was to witness to the Resurrection (1: 21f.) According to Luke the Twelve are apostles in a unique and almost exclusive way.⁴ Only twice by way of exception is the term used in the Acts (14: 4, 14) to describe Paul and Barnabas. During his life-time the Twelve disciples represented Jesus' mission to the whole of Israel constituted by the twelve tribes. In the early Church the Twelve represent symbolically the nature of the Church as God's eschatological people.⁵

4. St. Paul's understanding of "apostle" is much broader. He claims the title of apostle emphatically and defends his claim energetically (Gal 1: 1, 12), although he admitted that he was the least of the apostles (1 Cor 15: 9). Moreover, Paul distinguishes the apostles from the Twelve (cf. 1 Cor 15: 5, 7). He characterizes Andronicus and Junias as apostles (Rom 16: 7). According to Paul direct contact with the earthly Jesus is not necessary for apostleship. Paul's claim was based on the commission given to him by Christ to be an apostle of the Gentiles, in his great experience of the risen Lord. For a comparison of the Lucan and Pauline pictures of the apostles cf. R. B. Brown, *Priest and Bishop*, Chapman, London, 1971, pp. 47-73.

5. Cf. H. Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1973 p. 56. The Council of the community at Qumran was constituted by twelve men and three priests. It is not clear whether the three priests were outside the circle of the twelve men. This council had a symbolical and eschatological significance. The Qumran parallel does not shed much light on the role of the Twelve in the early Church. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *Jewish Christianity in Acts in Light of Qumran Scrolls*, in: L. E. Keck and J. L. Martyn (ed.), *Studies in Luke-Acts*, S. P. C. K., London, 1968, pp. 233-257 (246).

Apart from Peter's apostolate, we know little about the precise work of the other apostles in the Jerusalem Church. Though John is named several times and the martyrdom of James is mentioned (Acts 12: 2), the rest of the Twelve pass into complete oblivion.

The Seven and the Hellenists

Chapter 6 of 'Acts' speaks of the Hellenists led by a group of seven deacons. The Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora living in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2: 5ff.) who had become Christians. Acts 6: 9 speaks of a Synagogue in Jerusalem belonging to the Hellenists. There was tension between the Hebrews (Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians of Jerusalem) and the Hellenists, which according to the Acts was due to discrimination against Hellenist widows in the provision for widows organized by the community. This situation arose because the double task of the ministry of the word and the ministry of the tables was too much for the Twelve to administer fittingly. They decided to expand the organization and to divide the work by entrusting the ministry of tables to a group of seven men. The community chose these seven, and the Twelve, as the leaders of the community, appointed them in office through the rite of the laying of hands.

The presentation of the Acts appears simple. But there are some significant features in the narrative which need interpretation. Why did the Twelve, overburdened as they were, neglect only the widows of the Hellenists? Did the Hellenists live in a separate community? Why were all the seven taken from among the Hellenists, as their Greek names indicate? It is surprising that the Twelve entrusted the whole ministry of tables to these Hellenists alone when it would have been more proper to entrust it to a mixed group. We are further surprised that later in the narrative there is no mention of any ministry of tables by the Seven. Stephen, the most outstanding member of the group, is a miracle worker and preacher, proclaiming the word exactly like the apostles. Philip, another prominent deacon, evangelized Samaria and the coastal region (Acts 8). We are led to think that the Seven were the leaders of the Hellenist group in the Jewish Christianity of Jerusalem. The Hellenists had their own approach

to the Jewish Law and temple. If they alone faced persecution from the Jews (8: 1) it is because there was something in their preaching and conduct opposed to the Jewish religion. The accusation against Stephen that he was speaking against the Law and the temple (8: 11-14) and the speech of Stephen (7: 44-53) illustrate this. The Hellenists realized that their faith in Christ had far-reaching consequences for the value of Judaism and its institutions. This insight was very important for their future missionary activity. After their expulsion from Jerusalem they proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 11: 19 ff.) against the policy of the Jewish Christians. They received the Gentiles into the Church without imposing on them the rite of circumcision or the Jewish Law. It is thus clear that the Hellenists formed a separate group within the early Jewish Christianity. In this context the role of the Seven can best be understood as that of leadership of the Hellenists.⁶ It is doubtful whether they stood beneath the Twelve. Their position seems to be parallel to that of the apostles. The presentation of Acts 6: 6 and the appointment in office through the laying of hands, perhaps reflect a later development of Church structure. We see the early Church branching in two directions, the Jewish Christianity of Jerusalem and the mixed communities outside formed through the work of the Hellenists. Each developed in its own way theologically and structurally. Yet the Hellenistic Churches kept up good relations with the Church of Jerusalem. Barnabas played an important role as mediator in the unity of the old and new communities (cf. Acts 11: 22 ff). Jerusalem, as the place of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus, always had central importance for the early Church.⁷

6. Cf. H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 56-59; R. Zehnle, *The Making of the Christian Church*, Fides, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1969, p. 16f. 27.

7. On the importance of Jerusalem in Luke's Theology of History, cf. H. Flender, *St. Luke, Theologian of Redemptive History*, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1967, pp. 107 ff; P. Simson, *The Drama of the City of God: Jerusalem in St. Luke's Gospel*, in: M. R. Ryan (ed.), *Contemporary New Testament Studies*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1965, pp. 224-237.

The Elders

The elders as a group appear abruptly in Acts 11: 30 as representatives of the Jerusalem community to which relief was sent from Antioch. At the Apostolic Council they stand beside the Apostles and play a leading role: the fixed expression "the apostles and the elders" is used in Acts 15: 2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 6: 4. St. Paul in Gal. 2 referring to the Apostolic Council does not mention them. We do not know when or why the college of elders was formed, or what their precise function was. They are mentioned together with the apostles; no independent role is assigned to them. Probably the office of the elders in the Jewish community (cf. Acts 4: 5, 8, 23; 6: 12) influenced the institution of elders in the Jerusalem community. According to 'Acts' Paul appointed elders in the Churches he had founded (Acts 14: 23). The leaders of the Church at Ephesus are called elders (20: 17). It is, however, very surprising that the (authentic) letters of Paul do not mention elders. Does the sudden presence of elders mean a trend towards fixed Church order? The little information we can gather from 'Acts' does not permit us to draw any conclusion regarding the nature of this office in the Jerusalem community. It is even possible that Luke has projected a later Church order (which will presently be discussed) into the Jerusalem community.

Peter and James the Brother of the Lord

Undoubtedly Peter held the pre-eminent position among the disciples of Jesus. According to the unanimous testimony of the Gospels Peter was among the first disciples that Jesus called. He belonged to the intimate circle of three (or four) disciples of Jesus. He acted as the spokesman of the group on decisive occasions. It is particularly emphasized that the risen Lord appeared to Peter first (cf. Lk 24: 34; 1 Cor 15: 5) Peter's role of leader continues in the Jerusalem community. We find him taking the initiative in the election of Matthias (Acts 1: 21) on Pentecost (2: 14); and in general during the earlier period of the Church (cf. 3: 1ff; 5: 3 ff. 15, 29). After his conversion Paul went to Jerusalem in order to meet Peter (Gal 1: 18). It is surprising, therefore, that during the period of the Apostolic Council Peter was only one of the "pillars" of the Jerusalem Church, apparently ranking after James, the brother of the Lord (cf. Gal 2: 9).

Peter still played a decisive role in the Apostolic Council, but James's role was almost equally important. Eventually the leadership of the Jerusalem Church passed into the hands of James.

James the brother of the Lord (Mk 6: 3; Gal 1: 18) was probably among the brethren of Jesus who did not understand him during his public life (cf. Mk 3: 21, 31, 35). The special appearance of the risen Lord to him (1 Cor 15: 7) would have converted him to Jesus' cause. Coming to Jerusalem to join the community of disciples he would have brought along with him other members of the family of Jesus. According to Acts 1: 14 the mother of Jesus and his brothers belonged to the pre-Pentecostal community. James became very early, after Peter, the most prominent figure of the Jerusalem Church; during his first visit to Jerusalem (35-37 A. D.) Paul met not only Peter but James (Gal 1: 13). Gal 2: 9 characterizes him as a "pillar" and mentions his name first along with Peter and John. James had considerable influence on Peter (cf. Gal 2: 12). During Paul's last visit to Jerusalem (57-58 A. D.) James alone, with the college of elders, was ruling the Jerusalem Church (Act 21). Peter is no more mentioned. He was no more in Jerusalem. Gal 2: 11 ff. mentions his visit to Antioch; and 1 Cor 9: 5 speaks of him as an itinerant apostle. He was accomplishing his mission to the circumcised (Gal 2: 7 f). Perhaps he was forced to leave Jerusalem because of his rather liberal views regarding the Jewish Law (cf. Gal 2: 14). In any case James became the head of the Jerusalem community and held this position until his martyrdom in A. D. 62. His prominence was based on the special appearance of the risen Lord (1 Cor 15: 7) and particularly on his blood relationship with Jesus. His personal merits also were outstanding.⁸ He was known even among the Jews as James "the just". Although he did not wish to oblige the Gentile Christians to observe the Jewish Law, he wanted the Jewish Christians to observe it faithfully. It was probably his faithfulness to the Law which earned for him the esteem of the Jews. He could remain in Jerusalem at the head of the Jewish Christian community up to the intensification

8. Cf. R. Zehnle, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-40; H. Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 156 f.

of the political crisis leading to the Jewish war. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. the mother Church of Jerusalem ceased to exist.

The hierarchical structure of the earliest Church in Jerusalem therefore did not develop according to any preconceived plan. For obvious reasons the Twelve had a prominent place in the Church, The further development of offices cannot be traced back to any directives set down by the earthly Jesus. The needs of the Church and of historical situations suggested structural forms. They were developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate source of the life of the Church.

II. The Hellenistic Churches

The Hellenists, scattered by persecution (Acts, 8: 1. 4 ff; 11: 19 ff.) founded many Christian communities outside Jerusalem. Antioch was the most flourishing of them. The Hellenistic communities were, at the beginning, mixed communities of Jewish and Gentile Christians. After his conversion Paul attached himself to the Hellenistic communities. Many of these were founded particularly by Paul's missionary labours. There was no break between them and the mother Church of Jerusalem. The centrality of Jerusalem as the place where the salvation events occurred, and the authentic witnesses of the faith lived, was universally recognized. The unity of the Church was clearly perceived. The common faith in Jesus Christ binds all Churches together. In the Christian proclamation adaptations to the situation of the Hellenistic hearers were made. For example, while for the Jews "Messiah" was the most expressive title which revealed Jesus' historical significance as regards salvation, the favourite title of Jesus for the Gentiles was "the Lord". Paul found this title already in use in the Hellenistic Churches and he used it frequently in his letters.

Concerning the organization of the Hellenistic Churches we have only incidental information, particularly from the letters of Paul. The early Church did not think that her unity demanded an over-arching organization with fixed forms. The local communities were understood as local representations and realizations

of the universal Church. In these communities only a minimum of organization was established.

The Church order was comparatively free. The structures of the Jerusalem Church were not reproduced in other localities. The institutions of the Twelve, or of the Seven, or the three "pillars" were not copied. In the early period there is no evidence of the institution of elders. St. Paul speaks of various forms of ministries.⁹ The classical tables of ministries are Rom 12: 6-8; 1 Cor 12: 8-10; Eph 4: 11. 1 Cor 12: 28 is particularly interesting because it lists ministries in the order of importance: "*first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, *then* workers of miracles..." All these ministries are given by God for the building up of the community. Many of these ministries are related to the word. Prophets and teachers are found also at Antioch (Acts 13: 1 ff.). The Epistle to the Philippians (1: 1) mentions bishops and deacons as persons of special prominence in the Church. A monarchical structure had not yet emerged. There were several bishops (cf. Plural) at Philippi. How they differed from deacons or ministers is not clear.

Towards the end of the first century Church organization began to take on fixed forms. The pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Tim; Titus) present a rather developed Church order. The offices of the bishop (1 Tim 3: 1-7; Titus 1: 7-11), the elders (1 Tim 5: 17-19; Titus 1: 5f.) and the deacons (1 Tim 3: 8-13) are mentioned.¹⁰ They were the leaders of the Church. The distinction between the offices of the bishop and of the presbyters is not clear. The regular use of the singular for the bishop and of the plural for the presbyters suggests that there was only one bishop and a college of presbyters. The authentic letters of Paul never mention elders; only Phil. 1: 1 refers to bishops and deacons without saying anything further about their offices.

The pastoral epistles insist less on the mystical aspect of the Church than on the sociological. The Church is considered

9. Cf. H. Kung, *The Church*, Burns & Oates, London, 1969 pp. 395 ff.

10. For a bibliography on the Church order in the Pastoral epistles, cf. A Lemaire, *art. cit.*, pp. 145-147.

as a sociological institution. The author shows great concern for the guarding of the message against false teachers.. The leaders of the community have the duty of teaching the right doctrine. High moral qualities are required from the office-holders. 2 Tim 1: 6 alludes to a rite of ordination. For the first time here we meet fixed forms of Church offices.

How these offices developed in the early Church is not very clear. Disciples and companions of missionary apostles like Paul probably began to reside in particular Churches and eventually exercised pastoral care over them. In some cases they were probably appointed by missionary apostles (cf. Phil. 1: 1). Churches without presbyter bishops would have ultimately established themselves in imitation of others that had this structure. A special apostolic appointment cannot be proved.¹¹ The institution of the council of presbyter bishops gradually emerged in answer to the needs of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

The New Testament emphasizes the permanent role of the Holy Spirit in guiding the Church. In the early Church we can see the gradual development towards institutionalization under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning, in the Jerusalem community there was no fixed and developed Church order. There existed nothing that can be called a fixed office. The apostles, the official witnesses of the resurrection, held, under the leadership of Peter, an eminent position in the community. Later in the fifties, James, the brother of the Lord, surrounded by the elders, guided the Church; but no official title was given to him. There is no further development in the Jerusalem Church because it ceased to exist after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. Hellenistic Churches were rather unstructured at the beginning. But by the end of the first century hierarchically ordered Church offices evolved. The needs of the Church were at the basis of this process. The pastoral epistles emphasize the need for guarding

11. Cf. R. E. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73; R. Zehnle, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

the authentic doctrine, for which the presbyter-bishop organization to lead the community, was responsible. The official leaders have also the function of preserving the continuity of the Church in God's plan of salvation. Moreover, the need for more concrete and visible structures within the communities was naturally felt as the community developed into a larger sociological reality with its different dimensions. In all this development the believer can discern the work of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church of God in ways corresponding to His will.

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The Councils and their Activities: A short Historical Survey

One of the principal results of Vatican Council II has been to bring into focus the importance of a council as a means towards fostering greater ecclesial awareness and wholesome progress. Moreover the international synod, the third session of which took place in autumn 1974, has also helped the Christian world to take stock of the synodal approach to the discussing and solving of major issues. The Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition have not been deaf to the renewed call for a council of their own, whatever be the name which will eventually be given to it.

It is often forgotten even today that until as late as the beginning of the 17th century the Catholic Church, though very much reduced to its Western expressions, had known for centuries the use of councils and synods. It was still more so in the case of the undivided Church of the first millennium. The short

survey attempted in these notes calls for a somewhat precise use of the terms involved, i.e. *council* (from a Latin root) and *synod* (from a Greek root). Whatever be their present theological, canonical or other meaning, we shall call *council* those assemblies of the Church of a more general character (ecumenical, general, regional or inter-regional). The word *synod* will be reserved to smaller gatherings even when known as councils in the past. The adjectives *conciliar* and *synodal* will follow the same rule, except when *conciliar* is used to indicate the system of assemblies in Church life, such as *conciliar approach*, *conciliar system*, and the like.

I

General Survey

The 'peak eras' of conciliar activities

It can hardly be questioned that there were several periods of history when Church assemblies were both more frequent and more momentous.

The *first* that comes to our notice is the 3rd century, particularly from about A. D. 220 until about A.D. 270. Most of the gatherings involved deserve the name of councils, whether in North Africa, Rome, Antioch or Alexandria. Others were more localised as synods, e.g. in Arabia (today's Jordan and South East Syria) and in South Spain.

The *second* period, the 4th and 5th centuries, witnessed an impressive tempo of conciliar activities, the Christian East enjoying a larger share of them than the West. Not only do we have then the first four "ecumenical" councils (Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, Ephesus 431, Chalcedon 451), but also a large number of more or less general gatherings which met, for instance, in North Africa, Rome and Italy, South France, Illyricum, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. Many synods of various size were also held during that period, above all in the East. Even such autonomous Churches, as the Church of the East – the official name of the Church living in vast territories of the Persian empire, known centuries later as Chaldaean, Assyrian, etc. – or

the East – Syrian Church, began using the conciliar system as soon as it got out of difficult times like persecutions and wars.

In some places like North Africa large councils met at regular intervals, if not every year. From about the time of Pope Damasus (366-84) frequent, if not also yearly, synods and councils gathered in Rome, sometimes with a broad regional representation.

The *third* period between about A.D. 740 and the end of the 9th century, was marked by more frequent church gatherings, especially in the Visigothic and Frankish West. In the East, particularly in Constantinople, conciliar activities increased during the 9th century.

During the fourth period from about 1046 until the end of the 12th century the Catholic Church in the West experienced a remarkable revival of the conciliar practice. It was the direct outcome of the reformatory movement of the time and was quite active in the whole West except in the Iberian peninsula which was still engaged in a struggle against Arab inroads. From 1049 the synods and councils of Rome had been reactivated. At least twelve of these assemblies can deserve the name of general councils, three of which have passed for 'ecumenical' in the West i.e. the Lateran council of 1123, 1139 and 1179. The fourth Lateran council of 1215, though belonging to the 13th century, was their natural outcome and has gone down in history as the first really universal assembly of the West of those times. It was intended to be so by Innocent III, the pope who was both its convener and president.

On the other hand Constantinople was the venue of quite a series of councils and synods during two impressive periods, one extending from 1143 to 1170, and another of a shorter span between 1341 and 1370. Even a much smaller patriarchate like that of the Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites of the Antioch jurisdiction) knew of some periods of higher conciliar tempo, such as the 8th and 12th centuries.¹

1. P. Hindo, *Disciplina Antiochena Antica – Siri II – Les personnes* Vatican City, 1951, pp. 243-54.

One of the great periods of such assemblies in the West, the *fifth*, was the years 1408-52, noticeable for its large and frequent number of provincial, national (e.g. in France) and general councils, above all the council of Pisa (1403), the universal (ecumenical) council of Constance (1414-18) and that of Ferrara-Florence (1437-39), which actually began at Basle and ended in Rome. Even more than Lyons Council II (1274), the Florence assembly convoked, to a great extent, though not exclusively, in order to promote unity between the Greek East and the Latin West, included a full-fledged representative body of the Byzantine Orthodox Church. Other Eastern Churches soon became involved, though to a much less degree.

The *sixth* era of greater conciliar work preceded and followed the universal (ecumenical) council of Trent (1545-63, with six years of actual proceedings). Such assemblies were rather of the provincial (ecclesiastical province) type and covered nearly all the west, particularly Italy, Germany, Bohemia, France, Spain, etc. Even after Trent we meet with similar activities in Latin America and in Goa with five successive provincial councils there.

In the Christian East, only Russia and the Turkish dominions knew of an important conciliar movement during the 16th and 17th centuries, e.g. with the great inter-patriarchal assemblies at Jerusalem in 1523 and in 1672, the council of the chapters at Moscow in 1551 (from the disciplinary viewpoint equivalent to the Tridentine reform, but for Russia only), and the great inter-patriarchal synod of Istanbul (Constantinople) of 1638 against Calvinistic infiltrations.

Can we still speak of a *seventh* period of active and frequent conciliar practice in the Church universal? Yes and no. Yes, if we mention the remarkable number of councils and synods in the Catholic Church, both among its western and eastern member-churches, since about 1842. Even India, after the 1886 establishment of its hierarchy, had a spate of provincial councils, and we have, of course, Vatican I as the ecumenical council of the Catholic Church mostly western in character in the 19th century. No, if we think that such series of provincial and

diocesan, if not national, assemblies are part of a real movement characteristic of a spirit and a period. Perhaps, the last seventy years which ushered in Vatican Council II, though less impressive by its number of councils and synods, have the 'synodal' spirit, which is particularly shown by the growing number of episcopal assemblies and conferences. They may not have the juridical note of synodal assemblies, yet they strongly suggest a conciliar approach to common problems.

The newly started universal synod of the Catholic Church, with all its limitations (above all it is only consultative so far..), indicates both the conclusion of an uncertain period and perhaps the beginning of strong and lasting reassuming of the synodal system of decision-making in the Catholic Church as it stands today.

Signs of continuity

Between the 'peak eras' just mentioned, the conciliar practice was never entirely given up, except in some rare cases of local, or patriarchal churches, e. g. the above-mentioned Church of the East which knew no conciliar system until the beginning of the 19th century when the majority of its members came into lasting communion with the Roman See. Moreover, in the West there was a fairly long period of conciliar oblivion, though not absolutely so, between the beginning of the 17th century and the French Revolution. Only some forms of clergy assemblies and a few councils and synods reminded the Church of her past practices.

Before summarizing those intermediary times the very beginning of Church gatherings should be recalled here. They go back to about 175 A. D., according to the present state of historical knowledge. The most important Churches were involved, especially those of the East. As for the first signs of continuity between the two 'peak eras' they are less frequent, though sometimes quite significant, assemblies of the 6th and 7th centuries, e. g. a general council of Italian bishops in Rome, 501 A. D., the well-known Orange Council II of South France in 529, III-XVII national councils of Toledo (Spain) between 589 and 694, the important synod of Whitby in England in 664. As for the East

mention should be made of at least two important assemblies at Constantinople, that of 536 with an exceptionally strong Western participation, and the great disciplinary council of 692, called 'In Trullo' or Quinisext. Above all there were two ecumenical councils in the Byzantine capital, those of 553 and 681. Without mentioning other Eastern Churches, the Church of the East had no less than seven important councils representing its whole patriarchate between 544 and 676.

Another intermediate period is apparently the 10th century, especially for the West, with some Frankish synods closely linked to the political circumstances then prevailing in the new Germanic empire, as well as one or two important assemblies in Constantinople. In the West again, during the 13th and 14th centuries, we come across not only three universal (ecumenical) councils, Lyons I in 1245, Lyons II in 1274 which stands out as the first attempt towards an official reconciliation between the Greek East and the Latin West and therefore was more than a western affair, and Vienne (France) in 1311. Though less frequent than before and after, there were also several regional, provincial and local assemblies, e. g. in Spain of the 14th century, who in order to reorganize her Church after freeing herself from the invaders held several national councils at Toledo.

In the East the patriarchal synods provided an abiding sign of continuity. Two gatherings of greater importance for the Byzantine Churches should be mentioned, viz. the synod of Constantinople of 1341 and the provincial council at Salonika in 1351. Both met to tackle the orthodoxy of St. Gregory Palamas, the foremost Greek theologian of the period. It must be admitted, however, that in most other Eastern Churches, except for their electoral synods and occasional patriarchal assemblies of a reduced size, the great times of large councils seem to have passed away, except in Armenia. Conciliar activity flourished there during the 13th and 14th centuries.

In the West however the most notable signs of continuity between the periods of Constance-Florence and of Trent were occasional provincial councils during the second half of the 15th century and also the general (ecumenical) council of Lateran in 1512-17, which was launched with great hope of long-expected

reform of the Church but unfortunately utterly failed to fulfil its task.

Other manifestations of the conciliar approach

The first use of the synod as a permanent organ of government, as a decision-making body, goes back to the end of the 4th century in Constantinople. Under the later name of a *permanent synod* it had become, by the 12th/13th century, the most complete and characteristic type of Church government in this form. It was also adopted by other Byzantine Churches. One of its results was considerably to cut down the patriarchal authority, if not in some cases to reduce it to a shadow of its past glories. In Russia for some 200 years (1721–1918) the Orthodox Church was ruled by an exclusive synodal system which was closely controlled by the Czarist government.

In more recent times, the non-Byzantine Churches of the East, including the Syrian Orthodox Church of India, also adopted the permanent synod or its equivalent. In some cases it can be suggested that it came about under some kind of Protestant influences. In most cases this type of synodal *rule* consists only of a group of bishops, whose membership is renewed according to various procedures.

From time immemorial the Eastern Churches, like the Roman Church herself understood as the see of Rome, always used the electoral synod for the choosing of their chief-bishop, as well as their metropolitans and their suffragans. Moreover these electoral synods, contrary to later Roman usage, often dealt with other matters of importance, though mostly after the election was over. When, however, the pressure of the State was exercised in such a way as to reduce, if not suppress, the freedom of elections, these were retained as a show than a reality. The same situation developed in Rome during the 10th and 11th centuries. One of the aims and achievements of the reforming popes of the 11th century was actually to free papal and episcopal elections from secular interference.

In another case, that of the Church of the East, electoral synods disappeared by the middle of the 15th century to be

replaced by a wholesale hereditary succession. Only after accepting communion with Rome could the Catholic line of Chaldaean patriarchs as direct successors to the so-called Nestorian Chief-bishops of old be elected by a synod. Armenia also during the first hundred years after its Christianisation had a hereditary system of succession among its main ecclesiastical leaders ('catholicos'); this system was attempted again for a while during the Middle Ages, but Armenia soon reverted to the conciliar or synodal practice and with the greatest fervour at that.

Under some form or other the *permanent synod* and the *electoral synod* have been kept up among the Eastern Catholic Patriarchates, and their use has been made obligatory by the new Oriental Canon Law dealing with persons. The permanent synod must meet at least three times a year.²

In Rome the permanent synod can be traced to the assembly of the local and suburbicarian *presbyterium*, already mentioned, under Pope John VIII (872-82), but by the 12th and 13th centuries it had become known as the *consistory* composed of the first growing college of cardinals and of neighbouring bishops. As far as the decision-making process was concerned, the consistory never enjoyed the importance of the permanent synod, though there were periods when its ascendancy was considerable, especially from the mid-15th century until after the council of Constance. After the period of Trent its importance steadily deteriorated.

In the West again, particularly in England with its *Convocations*, and in France with General and Particular Assemblies of the Clergy from about 1560, meetings of the national clergy assumed something of a synodal character, though very limited in scope.

As we should expect the Protestant movement with its return to Christian antiquity resumed the synodal practice at once, at least in those Reformed Churches which kept little or nothing of the existing traditions. Even the rather conservative Lutherans of Germany made use of a kind of synod, called the

2. V. J. Poshpishil, *op. cit.* pp. 160-68.

pastors' consistory, but by the 19th century a full-fledged system of synods was introduced and well developed. The Presbyterian or Calvinist Churches were even more so synodal churches from the start, though in several cases they fared badly under secular interferences. Modern Church Unions such as the Church of S. India and the Church of N. India have adopted and follow the synodal system in an exemplary way.

We should not overlook either the use of some kind of synodal practice among the religious orders both in the East and in the West. It is well-known that already Pakomius, the real founder of the monastic community or cenobitic life, foresaw for his 'order' – a rather closely guarded federation of monastic communities – a yearly general assembly of all the brethren. Yet, the rather unique role of the 'abba' (superior, abbot, archimandrite, hegumen, prior, etc.) was tempered only slowly by the rather uneven evolution of monastic gatherings.

In the East, the two rules of St Basil the Great and the community reorganized by St Theodore the Studite in Constantinople itself aimed at fostering the community spirit and even a kind of monastic council (Theodore Studita, 10 letter, *P. G.* 99, 915-44), but we have to wait for a long time to come across some sort of decision-making body in Eastern monasteries. One of the greatest centres is to be found on Mount-Athos in N. E. Greece; the very word 'republic' which is often used to indicate the inter-houses organisation of the Mount says much about their synodal practice both at the monastery level and for the control and smooth running of the whole 'republic'.

What has become known as a *chapter* (a *chapter* of the H. Scriptures, or of the Rule was read at the daily gathering of the brethren, or the sisters, hence the name for the assembly itself) in the West owes its origin at least to the Rule of St Benedict, which quickly enough became the charter of religious life in W. Europe. It mentions the whole community as the advisory council of the abbot who is elected by them³. Much later the Cistercians, successful reformers along Benedict's

3. J. McCann, Ed., *The Rule of St Benedict*, London, 1961, pp. 24-25.

lines, organized themselves, for the first time in the West, into an international 'order'. Its outcome was the regular holding of general chapters every year, presided over by the abbot of Citeaux, actually called the 'patriarchal father' like the eastern patriarchs today ('father and patriarch').

Meanwhile successive reforms brought into being a large number of federations, affiliations and orders of *regular canons*, whose origins perhaps go back at least to St Chrodegang of Metz (d. 766). They became, almost by definition, example of synodal government, and still more so their *secular* counterparts. Regular, even secular, communities of women began to appear as *canonical chapters* also, perhaps even before those of men.

The mendicant orders, e.g. Dominicans and Franciscans, which arose in response to a plea for greater poverty and democratic humility in the 13th century Church of the West, adopted at once a large measure of the conciliar system of decision-making. The general chapters originally met every year, like those of the Cistercians, at all levels. Superiors were and are elected by the respective chapters. It is generally admitted that the first English parliament owes much of its inspiration to the general chapters of the Middle Ages.

II

Interpretation and Reflection

Origin of the conciliar practice

As far as can be ascertained from first-hand documentation so far extant, the first synodal or quasi-synodal gatherings among Christians took place when a bishop was elected.⁴ If this can be proved, it means that such gatherings could have taken place everywhere at about the same time, since the 'monarchical' or single-bishop rule was not firmly established in the whole Church before the mid-2nd century; yet it already existed in a great number of places from the second-half of the 1st century, and therefore it is possible, though not provable, that some sort of quasi-synodal meetings could have taken place very early indeed.

4. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, VI, 29. 144-61.

We are on firmer grounds when we learn from Eusebius that at the time of the Montanist crisis 'assemblies of the faithful'⁵ gathered all over the expanding Church in order to find ways and means to oppose the wave of false prophetism. Then, about twenty years later, councils were held almost all over the Church, even at Edessa, at the behest of pope Victor of Rome to seek a solution to the ever-mooted Christian date of Easter.⁶

From that time onwards the conciliar practice increased, and by the middle of the 3rd century it tackled both doctrinal and disciplinary matters, basic problems which have ever since called councils and synods into being, outside mere electoral gatherings.

These early and immediate factors should be combined with more general ones, if the rapid strides taken by the conciliar movement in the 3rd century are to be understood. Not only did it express the need for mutual support and for a greater impact in favour of decisions taken in common, but such meetings stood for the sense of unity and solidarity in the Church that rested on the apostles, above all of those more important sees where the apostolic tradition was found at its best. The bishops more particularly shared among themselves a common responsibility to keep, defend and explain this apostolic tradition, since together they possessed that living authority handed over by Christ in the Spirit. Let us not forget either that such a sense of the Church had already been shown by fairly frequent exchanges of letters, visits and consultations.

New and old factors of development

During the many centuries that followed, above all during the ecclesial, doctrinal and patristic age of the 4th-6th centuries, new and old factors combined to shape the conciliar practice in the Church. It arose with renewed vigour through the first of those universal assemblies which would pass into history as the 'ecumenical councils'. The first four of them were made, later on, a standing symbol and test of catholic, orthodox, doctrine and life, almost equivalent to the four gospels.

5. *Ibid.*, V. 16.

6. *Ibid.*, V. 23-24.

These assemblies representing the whole existing Church, though then mostly Eastern in membership, cannot be said to have appeared all of a sudden. They were preceded by those several councils of the 3rd century, the importance of which was enhanced by the accelerating rate at which bishoprics, were set up especially in what is now called the Middle East. Such councils, mostly regional, had already fulfilled a task quite similar to that entrusted to the later 'ecumenical' councils, and about the same time and for the same problems, such as the revision of the penitential practice of the Church, and the validity of heretical baptisms. Even though on a much more regional basis, the trial and condemnation of leaders of doubtful doctrine and conduct took place such as the removal by councils of Paul of Samosata bishop of Antioch⁷. This means that councils and synods could be and were used as tribunals for very important cases, as in the first four ecumenical councils and in many provincial ones.

Granting that from the 4th century onwards there was a growing difference of outlook between East and West in the approach to conciliar practice, it was not as yet so divergent as to create fundamental divergences. What is more important was the support, if not the active involvement, of the Byzantine State as successor to the Roman one in fostering the conciliar system. However, it was not so much due to the pattern set up by the old Roman senate than to the use, by the imperial masters, of an existing Church practice. Moreover, the apostolic sees mentioned earlier, the leadership of which was particularly significant, continued their ascent to an ever greater sphere of influence, including the quickening of the conciliar experience and its broadening.

Not all factors were always and necessarily favourable either to the right use of these assemblies or to their acceptance at large. Among those factors which often played a less positive role, the following are worth mentioning: a tendency to make use of Church assemblies in order to ventilate and eventually solve, more than once not too justly, personal quarrels; rivalries between leading episcopal centres, e. g. Alexandria vs. Constantinople, if

7. *Ibid.*, VII, 27-30.

not Antioch; the exaggerated claims of certain leaders to controlling the affairs of the whole Church, e. g. Pope Leo X and the ineffectual Lateran council of 1512-17; passionate attachment to a type of orthodoxy which admits in practice of no pluralism i. e. legitimate expressions of Christian liberty e. g. contentiousness at Ephesus and Chalcedon between schools of theology, confusion between medieval scholasticism and the doctrine of the Church at Lyons II and Florence; interferences of the political power, especially of the Christian emperors of old, and in the west of emperors and kings, e. g. the French king at the council of Vienne (France), or Emperor Justinian at Constantinople II.

Even merely external events, as we should expect, had their say either in the conciliar halls or in its surroundings, like the plague for Trent, the Germanic invasions for the ecumenical councils since the 6th century, party politics in Constantinople at Photius' time, feudal conflicts at the first medieval Lateran assemblies, and the difficulty of communications for most of the great assemblies until the 19th century. Even later political systems like Erastianism in the Germanic lands, and Gallicanism in France and the Latin countries, were greatly responsible for the noticeable poverty of conciliar activities during the 17th-18th centuries. Even in the West the centralization wrought by the papacy since Avignon times tended to reduce the tempo of church assemblies, even more than the Byzantine supremacy in the East especially since about the 11th century.

Obstacles of these kinds tended also to make ineffectual decisions taken by councils as to the regular holdings of the assemblies. To quote a few well-known cases, the 5th disciplinary canon of Nicaea ordered that the provincial council should meet twice a year,⁸ but though the 4th century is filled with such councils they were certainly not as universally regular as the Nicaean Fathers wished them to be. In 745 the general council of the Frankish Church (N. France, the Netherlands, Germany, N. Italy) decided that it should be convened every year, a ruling which was not properly maintained. At Constance it was made compulsory for the whole Church, including the papacy, to hold an ecumenical council, first after five years, then after another

8. J. Alberigo, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

seven years, and thereafter every ten years⁹. This decree became a dead letter since the end of the Ferrara-Florence-Rome council. Trent took up also the question of holding more regular conciliar meetings and decided that in each ecclesiastical province a council should be held every three years, the first to be called a year after the end of the previous ecumenical session, and that in every diocese a synod should be had every year¹⁰. There were many serious attempts to carry out the Tridentine decision, but by the middle of the 17th century it had been too often, if not entirely, forgotten, at least regularly overlooked.

Inner characteristics of the Church assemblies

By comparing the East and the West in Christianity, one notices several striking features. On the one hand all the first seven ecumenical councils revered by both the Latin West and the Byzantine East were mostly Eastern both in membership and in the type of questions tackled there. Already since Nicaea, the presence of the papal delegates, firmly presiding since Chalcedon, secured the Western participation. On the other hand the medieval general councils were exclusively Western affairs, except those of Lyons II and Ferrara-Florence at which Greek delegates, were present, particularly at the latter. At any rate the pre-medieval general assemblies of the Church could be called 'imperial' and those belonging to medieval times 'papal', indicating thus that a central authority was needed in each case.

With these remarks we can proceed to spell out some of the most important traits of the Church assemblies, but without even attempting to be complete.

1) Conveners

Who can and does call such assemblies into being?

Before the forming of accepted customs, if not of authoritative law in the matter, there prevailed a fairly great variety, above all in the early local and regional meetings. Moreover our information is often scanty about the first conciliar era.

9. By the famous decree *Frequente*, *ibid.*, pp. 414-15.

10. Sessio XXV, *Decretum de Reformatione*, canon II, *ibid.*, p. 737.

All the same in most cases the metropolitan (a custom confirmed by Nicaea), the chief bishop and, later on, the patriarch usually convoked the regional, or the inter-regional council of his area of influence. In N. Africa until the Vandal invasions, and then during the renewed Byzantine presence, the bishop of Carthage used to convene the All-Africa council, though he never acquired the status of a chief-bishop. The Antioch council of 252 was convoked by bishop Helenus of Tarsus, and that of 365 by Hosius of Cordova who until he died a centenarian often acted by common consent as the elder bishop-statesman of the post-Nicene Church. Thus it could happen that another important prelate convoked a council outside his own area.

All the ecumenical councils of the first millennium were convoked officially by the Roman, later on Byzantine, emperors; since Ephesus they, as a rule used to obtain the previous consent of the bishops of the major sees, above all Rome and Constantinople. Even other general or regional councils were summoned by the emperor, e. g. between 341 and 359 nine large councils were convoked by the Roman rulers.

As already noted the Western and medieval councils were the affair of the pope, except Pisa (1409) which was convoked by the cardinals belonging to both papal obediences in order to put an end to the Great Schism of the West. Constance was launched and to some extent organized by Emperor Sigismund of Germany, the only ruler then who could invite the West to a general council in order to bring that Schism to a happy end.

In the West again in the wake of Gregorian reform many conciliar meetings, if not directly convoked, were at least inspired either by Rome or by the papal legates. In the East the patriarchs and the metropolitans remained more or less faithful to the Nicæan canons, but when several patriarchates were involved, the previous consent of their existing heads was sought. In Russia, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Czar, like the Byzantine ruler often played a major role by at least helping their Churches with the convocation of national councils.

Since Ferrara-Florence in the West, as officially acknowledged by modern Canon Law, all ecumenical councils are convoked

by the pope, and local councils and synods by the respective chief bishops. Even plenary or national councils today are convoked by the papal legate appointed to preside over the assembly.¹¹

This is of course due to the medieval and post-medieval development of Roman control over the Churches, often prompted by a reaction against abuses of the secular power in religious matters. This is a far cry from the early medieval practice of church assemblies, for in Visigothic Spain, perhaps under the influence of the Byzantine pattern, the king convoked both the national and provincial councils¹², and in the Frankish kingdom and empire the ruler acted in the same way, though only to summon the national council. The Carolingian ruler transformed the latter into a sort of ecclesiastical section of the national parliament¹³.

2) Membership and representation

No ecumenical¹⁴ council until Vatican I (and this as the Western type of such a general assembly) was ever fully representative of the whole Church; either they were too Eastern-sided or too Western-sided, with the exception of Lyons II and Ferrara-Florence.

In point of fact the Church universal rarely thought in the past, if it did at all, that physical universality was necessary; the moral kind was enough¹⁵. For instance in the East the

11. In the *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1917, canons 222, 281, 284, 356, 357.

12. Especially between 589 (III Council of Toledo) and c. 701 (XVIII Council of Toledo).

13. The twenty councils and synods of Aachen (Aquiagrana) between 789 and 862.

14. *Ecumenical* originally indicated the whole Greco-Roman empire of the Mediterranean world.

15. 'History has shown that it is far more the moral consensus subsequently given to conciliar decisions than either the extent to which they were truly representative or the fact of being due to papal initiative or of enjoying papal approval, which

tendency during the first millennium was to have each ecclesiastical province represented at least by its metropolitan bishop. Later on the presence of the patriarchs and other chief bishops were sufficient and as in the case of the early ecumenical councils, the papal delegates stood for the whole West, though other Western prelates were also invited.

For obvious reasons membership in more localized assemblies was better secured, and this holds good for all such regional, provincial and local councils today. For instance at national or plenary councils all the bishops and other superiors of a given area are expected to attend.

Were the assemblies always exclusively composed of bishops? Already the first testimony to the earliest conciliar practice speaks of 'assemblies of the faithful', a rather cryptic phrase which may have indicated the presence of priests, other clergy, and laymen as well. Though it was mostly bishops that took part in conciliar activities from the 4th century, there are many cases of non episcopal members being present, and having even the right of voting. Often, if not always, most of the papal delegates were not bishops, and they acted as full members. At the 3rd-century great councils of Antioch priests and deacons participated, a tradition which was kept up later on in the Antiochene patriarchate without, however, being given the right of vote. The presence of a few priests and deacons, perhaps as members, is mentioned at the Carthage council of A.D. 251 also.

In the East abbots and other monastic superiors occasionally took part in councils and synods, though apparently without ever enjoying the right to vote. On the other hand the universal councils of the medieval West since Lateran I (1125) included an increasing number of abbots - they are only priests - and later on other religious superiors. Delegates of chapters appeared at Lateran IV, 1215, as well as procurators of absent

endows them with such a degree of *auctoritas* as they may be held to possess', T. J. Jalland, *op. cit.*, p. 425. The council of Antioch of A. D. 264 was already quite representative of the whole Near East, and that of A. D. 268 of even the whole Church.

bishops and abbots at Vienne, 1311, and general councils after it until Trent; in both cases they were only priests. To these Constance, inspired by the medieval ideal of the corporation, added priest-delegates of the universities. Though such a broader membership was not kept up later, religious orders continued to send their superiors as representatives; at Vatican II abbots and other prelates enjoying episcopal jurisdiction, abbot-primates and presidents, and superiors general of exempt orders participated as full members.

Laymen did not always stay away from conciliar meetings, to start with, like those 'assemblies of the faithful' mentioned above. Christian rulers, such as the Christian Roman and Byzantine emperors, not only convoked councils but showed a keen and personal interest in their proceedings. As a matter of fact they took part fairly often in them either personally or through official representatives. In Visigothic Spain (6th-9th centuries) and in the Frankish territories (7th-10th centuries), the rulers inspired by combined Germanic and Byzantine mentalities participated with their lords in Church assemblies which thereby became akin to national parliaments. At Lateran II, 1139, aristocratic laymen were members, and from Lyons I, 1245, it became the accepted custom to invite Christian princes to be present, at least through their delegates. Trent was the last universal council of the West where this practice still prevailed.

3) Presidency

After the first century of conciliar experience some kind of tradition was created as far as those presiding over conciliar and synodal meetings were concerned. There were however some variations.

At Nicaea, the first general council of the Church, the emperor Constantine with bishop Hosius of Cordova (Spain) presided, though the emperor keeping faithful to the senatorial procedure, did not vote. Thereafter all the ecumenical and most of the general councils of the first millennium, almost all convened in the East, were presided over by the emperor or his imperial commissioners. Nevertheless, at Constantinople I Meletius of Antioch was president followed after his untimely death by St

Gregory of Nazianzus who felt obliged to resign before it was over. At Ephesus St Cyril of Alexandria imposed himself as president, though after the arrival of the papal delegates he acted in close cooperation with them. Only after Chalcedon was the question of presiding over ecumenical councils clearly solved: both the emperor, or his delegates, and the papal representatives were the presidents. In case the latter were not there, e.g. at the general council of Constantinople in 867, the Byzantine emperor (and his co-emperor) were the only presidents. Exceptional also was the pseudo-council of Ephesus in 439, which was ecumenical in intention, but which was so much dominated by Dioscoros of Alexandria as to make the papal delegates ineffective.

The ecumenical council of Constantinople II, 553, convened by the imperious will of Justinian the Great, should have been presided over both by himself and pope Vigilius, but the latter refused to exercise this function.

Even before they began meeting in the Lateran palace of Rome, the first great reformatory councils of the 12th century were already chaired by the pope himself. Only the council of Constance, owing to the extraordinary circumstances of the time, was presided over by elected members until the election of the new pope, Martin V. Emperor Sigismund who had convoked it also chaired one of the sessions. At Basle, at Ferrara-Florence and at Lateran V (1512-17) the pope governed the assemblies either personally or through his legates. Trent followed the same rule, though the pope could not be present at all, Vatican I & II reverted rather to the procedure of Lateran V and of Florence.

Otherwise in most regional and provincial councils as well as synods, the one who presides is generally the Church leader who convokes them, the local bishop, the metropolitan, the patriarch, or the secular ruler himself as sometimes happened in the medieval and modern West. Many regional, if not local assemblies in the Western Church were presided over by papal legates, some of whom, like the Archbishop of Canterbury, were 'legati nati'. i.e. permanent legates, the legatine powers being conferred with the Roman *pallium*.

4) Reception

The inner dynamics of the Church assemblies are not described here. It suffices to remark with Fr. Dvornik that from the 4th century onwards the general and ecumenical assemblies closely followed the pattern of deliberations for centuries in the Roman Senate.¹⁶ More relevant to our survey is the vexed problems of the reception of conciliar decisions, above all those of ecumenical councils.

At the local, provincial and inter-regional level the reception corresponded, as a rule, to the acceptance of the participating bishops and their zeal in applying the conciliar decisions to their own flock. Obviously there have been, throughout the history of councils, opponents to conciliar decisions, particularly those who had been condemned by them.

As for the general and the ecumenical councils it appears that since Constantine's time the decisions taken by bishops in council were regarded as final, as expressing the divine will itself. But, as we know, even Nicaea which was unanimous in declaring its Creed met with much opposition, even from those who had accepted the symbol of the faith. It took nearly three-quarters of a century for it to be accepted by most of the churches except, of course, the diehards among the Arians and Semi-Arians. Even a saint like Cyril of Jerusalem could still hesitate to accept it some forty years after Nicaea.

Hence it must be admitted with Pope Julius I (337-52) that the reception of a council, i. e. its general and binding character, was not due to the mere weight of conciliar decisions by themselves, nor to their promulgation by the State authorities, but to their recognition by the whole Church. This is a declaration which explains why it happened that delayed acceptance of councils, even of ecumenical ones, even by quite orthodox parties, was sometimes met with. What is more, certain assemblies became ecumenical only after some time, e.g. through a more clearly ecumenical council.

16. D. Dvornik, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

Some cases to the point may be mentioned. The council of Sardica in 343 which was intended as a general assembly met with recognition only in the Western dioceses of the Church. Constantinople I, 381, which was only a general council of the East, was granted ecumenical status only by Chalcedon seventy years later¹⁷. The quinisext council in the same city, convened in 692 to complete the disciplinary work of the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils (hence its name) was intended by its conveners and participants as an ecumenical council probably with the presence of papal delegates, but it was not generally accepted by the West, except from the 8th century when its canons were regarded as belonging to the sixth ecumenical council. The fifth ecumenical council, 553, on account of the pressure exercised by emperor Justinian I on pope Vigilius led to such a tension between the Eastern and Western regions that the African bishops took some years to recognize it, and in North Italy Milan and its churches waited until 570, Aquila and Grado until 607 before accepting it. Even the very ecumenicity of the fifth council was not universally acknowledged until the 7th century.

As regards the general councils of the medieval West, not only are they not accepted in the East, where all of them, except Lyons II and Florence, are hardly relevant at all, but, what is more, only Lateran IV, 1215, was really intended by pope Innocent III as an ecumenical assembly, reviving a practice of the first millennium. This explains why even Ferrara-Florence, owing likely to the strong Greek participation, officially regarded itself as the *eighth ecumenical council*. This is a fact of conciliar history which shows that the so-called *eighth ecumenical council* of 869-70 was discarded then and there. But, as historical research has abundantly proved in recent years, this council connected with the Photius affair, not only was not intended and worked out as an ecumenical assembly but its decisions were abrogated by another Constantinople council also presided over by papal delegates. Only by the 12th century, for the sake of theologico-canonical argumentation, was it accepted by the canonists of the West as the eighth ecumenical council.

17. It was acknowledged by Rome only at the time of St Gregory I (590-604).

Finally, one must wait until editions of conciliar collections in the 17th century come out to be sure of the present number of ecumenical councils accepted in the West. Such a list has never been officially confirmed by the Church.

As we already know from the very irregular membership of Church assemblies, especially of the ecumenical councils, the reception of their decisions never depended on the exact and numerical representation of a given region or province or of the whole Church. Unanimity and authority, both in time and space, were and are still, to a great extent the criteria for conciliar validity. One of the most important means towards strengthening the reception of councils were the synodal letters. Their use is already noticed about A. D. 190 at the time of the Easter-date controversy. At the council of Antioch in 268 the letters were addressed to the whole Church, and the word '*ecumene*' was used. They became a common practice, for centuries, always with the avowed intention of involving as many Churches as possible through their bishops who would thus be united with the conciliar fathers. They disappeared in the West during the Middle Ages on account of the overwhelming influence of the popes on conciliar developments¹⁸.

5) The bishop of Rome and the councils

Several aspects of conciliar endeavours have been mentioned and their relation to the bishop of Rome, the pope, i. e. to the Roman councils or synods since the 4th century, and to the papal councils since the Middle Ages in the West, and the status of papal delegates and legates to councils.

One important question remains to be considered, viz. the reception of council decisions *vis-à-vis* the papacy. As far as the ecumenical councils of the first millennium are concerned the presence of papal delegates, to begin with, the two priests representing the Roman see at Nicaea, was generally regarded as one of the conditions of universality of such assemblies. As such they

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18. The criteria of ecumenicity and therefore of reception in the medieval West became two: a membership as universal as possible; the action of the pope as convoking and presiding'

did not need therefore papal approval of any sort after the synodal letters had been sent to all the Churches. In some cases to resolve doubts or give additional authority, to them a specific approval of the pope was sought. This was the case with the 28th disciplinary canon of Chalcedon and the canonical decisions of the Quinisext Council. Actually in those early centuries the consent of Rome, either in conciliar matters or in any other form of relationship, was mostly sought in doctrinal matters; hence the exceptional character of the two councils in question. As regards the legal application of the early general councils under the patronage of Roman and Byzantine rulers it was left to the latter to give them the force of law; the same action was taken by the Visigothic rulers of Spain and by the Frankish kings and emperors.

On the other hand, during the 4th and 5th centuries, there already developed among the African bishops, often meeting in council, signs of some conviction that a local decision taken in a council could not be universally valid without some kind of a Roman verdict¹⁹. With the growing awareness in Rome of the papal primacy as successor to Peter's leadership we come across such claims as those of Pope Gelasius I (492-96) who upheld the papal rights of approving councils²⁰. We know also that Pelagius II, probably inspired by the same principle, declared null and void a local synod of Constantinople in 588 against a certain Gregory, who most likely had appealed to Rome. Already in 531 pope Bonifatius II had given his approval to the doctrinal decrees of the second council of Orange (South France, July 529) at the personal request of St Caesarius of Arles, its president. He purposely left the disciplinary canon unapproved, he added, since he could trust Caesarius's zeal.

From Pope Nicholas I's time onwards (858-67)²¹ the primacy and some of its chief juridical expressions had become so conscious in the mind of the popes and their advisers that it was even claimed that councils and synods derived their validity from

19. T. J. Jalland, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 324-25.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 383-84.

papal approval. This was not identified as yet with papal confirmation, and either previous or concurrent approval (by the presence of legates) was considered adequate. Only since the end of the 11th century, under the impact of the Gregorian ideology of reform and papacy, did canonists develop the papal ideology of conciliar control, to such an extent that the general councils of the medieval West, except Constance, often became almost like advisory synods of the pope. From Ferrara-Florence onwards a better balance was kept.

As we should expect the official texts of the four Lateran councils of medieval times, of the following two Lyons councils and of Vienne were promulgated in such a way as to pass almost as mere papal constitutions. Constance reverted to a more traditional and conciliar approach by attributing each decree to the council itself, a practice which was again followed by Trent, but not by Ferrara-Florence and by Lateran V (1512-17). The title of the documents published by Vatican I and Vatican II is more akin to that of Ferrara-Florence, i. e. each conciliar decision is preceded by the name of the the pope and then mention made of the council itself.

When the pope was always or often personally presiding over the deliberations of a general council since the 12th century, there was really no need of further papal confirmation. Only after Constance, though the newly elected pope, Martin V, presided over its last sessions, did his successor Eugene IV confirm the conciliar decisions, in so far as they did not curtail papal primacy and jurisdiction. Since the Tridentine council was held far from Rome, all its decrees were solemnly confirmed by Pope Pius IV on January 28th, 1564, less than two months after the last session.

Conclusions

Though they belong to the historical role played by the conciliar practice in the life of the Church there is no intention here of summarizing the various theological and ecclesiological theories which underlie the evolution of Church assemblies. It is perhaps enough to mention them briefly: the episcopal inter-communion of St Cyprian; the more conciliarist approach of the

West and the more federalist one of the East which became expressed by the pentarchy theory; the corporative and conciliarist canonico-theological views of the medieval West; the *sobornost* vision of the Church of the slavophile theologians of the last hundred and fifty years; the modern eucharistic theology of ecclesial relations.

Some remarks as reflections on the vast conciliar experience of the Church are however called for in these concluding paragraphs.

1) Viewed in the background of the New Testament and sub-apostolic times the councils and synods in the history of the Church appear so much bound up with her ideals and life that in her own eyes they are one of the most forceful and concrete manifestations of her awareness as a communion. Therefore it can be said that they continue the first eucharistic assemblies as the constantly renewed *epiclesis* – invocation and descent – of the Holy Spirit over the Church which prolongs the apostolic community through its identity, continuity and creativity.

In the same way, as many great convictions of Christians, such as the sacramental septenary, underwent a long and involved development, a slow unfolding of the apostolic tradition, so the use of official assemblies in the Church took some time to be regularized, grew in very different directions, and was a factor of both enrichment and diversity for the Church.

2) This does not mean that the age-long practice of such Christian meetings was an unmixed blessing. However, it seems, some of their best qualities shone during the 3rd century with that combined freedom and freshness of approach that characterized a time when Christians still often personally shared a wonderful sense of unity and catholicity. Obviously much more conciliar experience, both positive and negative, has been gathered ever since, even in our own days.

3) The history of conciliar practice tells us, in the first place, that no such meeting can be successfully carried out without a strong sense of belonging, of spiritual unity in diversity, and without a direction, firmly founded on principles and respectful

of Christian freedom. These two conditions were not always fulfilled even in recognized ecumenical councils: hence the clashes and the extreme tensions followed by divisions and schisms which were avoidable. Any aggravated supremacy, ecclesiastical or secular, any ideology which under excusable circumstances overtook, in any way, the sense of communion, has disturbed, often impeded, and sometimes suppressed the normal play of the conciliar system. The other abuse is no better, namely a mere federalist conception of the Church. It either prevents any real council from meeting at all, or, if one assembles, it becomes a gathering with elements which are not well integrated, perhaps with undue appeals to some sort of democratic ideal. This type of abuse renders the process of decision making in council rather slow and weak, if it does not neutralize the system itself.

The only remedy is a renewed ecclesiology focused on the conciliar and synodal experience.

4) Much adverse criticism has been levelled against the links which were forged since the 4th century between Christian rulers and the councils. Should those links be called only fetters that enslaved the Church? Our appraisal of those past relations should be based on the historical role of the laity in Christianity. It cannot be denied that those links provided, within certain limits, a lay participation in the life of the Church. Moreover those rulers were the only ones then able to fulfil the material conditions of such assemblies, particularly from the viewpoint of communications. Whatever be our present views on the place of the laity in the Church, those past links, clumsy as they seem today, remind us that no lasting solution has so far been found to allow them to take their rightful share in the decision making process of the Church.

5. In the Christian East the conciliar synodal system has not always been equally well maintained, either on account of the wrong type of Church-State relations or, in recent times, owing to the infiltration of either authoritarian or false democratic ideals. Yet the *permanent synod* has been kept, sometimes in an exemplary manner, and therefore it provides much experience for the Church at large.

In the Catholic West, and all those Churches influenced by it, the conciliar approach has suffered much first from the wrong type of concordats and secondly from the after-effects of 19th century papalism. Vatican II has laid down the principles of a renewed ecclesiology of communion, and therefore it has paved the way to a more authentic conciliar and synodal practice in the Church.

6) All the same, in spite of episcopal conferences and a spate of meetings of all kinds it is still a mooted question whether the Catholic Church is really ready to re-introduce the regular use of councils and synods. The international Roman Synod is full of hope, but much of its inner and outer difficulties can be attributed to the fact that it is not prepared by the common practice of the conciliar/ synod system at the local Church level. Only the Catholic patriarchates have it, often with great zeal and perseverance, but those Oriental Catholic Churches which do not enjoy the benefits of the patriarchal organization often either oppose or at least by-pass the conciliar practice because courage and vision are missing among their clergy and leading laity.

7) Owing to the synodal character of most of the Orthodox Churches, and also of nearly all the Anglican and Protestant Churches, there is no doubt that the ecumenical movement will gain greatly if the Catholic Church, in the spirit of Vatican II, is able to reactivate her own conciliar movement. No amount of priest senates, pastoral councils and the like can replace the real, healthy and all-pervading synodal practice, at all levels including those of government and of decision-making.

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The Process of Centralization in the 2nd Millennium

It is a fact of history that during the 2nd millennium an unprecedented centralization has taken place in the structural set-up of the Church. Various events and factors have contributed to this process. As it is beyond the scope of this article to deal with all such events and factors, in the following pages we shall treat of the most important ones which occurred in three different periods of the 2nd millennium of the history of the Church.

I. Centralization in the first centuries of the 2nd millennium

At the dawn of the 2nd millennium we come across two events which had far-reaching repercussions in the life and history of the Church: the Eastern Schism and the Gregorian Reform.

1. The Eastern Schism. The existing doctrinal differences and the growing cultural and political alienations between the Eastern and Western sections of the Church during the 9th and 10th centuries gradually paved the way for the definite break-away of the Eastern Church under the Patriarch of Constantinople from communion with Rome. The immediate occasion for this separation, as is well known, was the publication of the Bull on the 16th of July 1054 by the Papal Delegate Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, excommunicating Patriarch Michael Caerularius and his supporters¹.

As a result of this schism and the growing spread of Islam, which had already occupied the northern part of Africa and a great part of the Middle East, the Western Church was con-

1. Cfr. Hubert Jadin and John Dolan, 'Handbook of Church History' Vol. III (London, 1969), pp. 413-17.

fined to Central and Western Europe which was then geographically almost coterminous with the Roman-Germanic world. In this region the Pope was the centre of every ecclesiastical activity without an opposition or rival. At that time the Germanic peoples entertained a very special devotion to the successor of Peter and Rome was for many of their communities the Mother of all Western Churches. In this Roman-Germanic world, therefore, the primatial authority of the Pope included and absorbed the patriarchal authority as well. Obviously this development gave greater strength to all the rulings and directives issued by Rome. As really happened, the vitality of the Church in Rome was to succeed in the following centuries in extending its universality practically to the whole world as the era of the world mission began with ever growing evangelization in North and South America, Asia, Africa and in Oceania. In the newly-established Churches of these continents the primatial authority of the bishop of Rome had a centralizing character as it had developed in the first centuries of this millennium in the West.

2. The Gregorian Reform. For a correct understanding of the process of centralization of the Church structures in the 2nd millennium it is important to consider what is known as the "Gregorian Reform". The great ecclesiastical reform of the 11th and 12th centuries which liberated the Church from previous miseries arising out of simony, lay investiture and the repeated failures time and again in the observance of the law of clerical celibacy, was introduced by Popes who preceded Gregory VII 1073-1085 with the help of saintly abbots and illustrious prelates. This reform was carried on even after the death of Pope Gregory VII by his successors. Still owing to the very strong impulse and encouragement given by him first as the Archdeacon Hildebrand and later as Pope, it is rightly called 'Gregorian Reform'.

In order to implement it and to assure the freedom of the Church from the feudal servitude of the lay investiture, Gregory VII, and the Pope who followed him, thought it necessary and urgent to set up a government of ecclesiastical centralization which would strengthen the bonds of union between dioceses and Rome so that the Pope could act in all countries in a direct

and effective manner². The following were a few of the measures taken by the Popes in order to achieve the desired goal.

i. Papal legates

The intended church reform was achieved first through the constant mission of legates as representatives of the Pope. In fact the entire reform activity of Pope Gregory VII and of his successors can be studied just from the history of their legates. Some of them were permanent while others were entrusted with a temporary concrete and particular task. All of them convoked synods and promulgated Papal Decrees.

ii. Primates and metropolitans

One of the centralizing measures taken by the reform Popes consisted in attenuating the role which Primates used to play in their respective countries. With the reduction of their jurisdiction the Archbishop-Primates of Carthage, Canterbury, Toledo, Lyons, etc. became more or less like Metropolitans, as the more important decisions were reserved to the Holy See. Even the very personality of Metropolitans was gradually being diminished by the presence of Papal legates at provincial synods, and by the desire of the Pope to be in more frequent and closer contact with the metropolitans. The latter were often asked by the Pope to come to Rome to receive the pallium etc. All these forces contributed to a great extent, to the consolidation and centralization of the authority of the Church in the person of the Pope.

iii. Local bishops and exempted religious institutions

The local bishop as he is the centre of the local Church, has an essential role to play in the administration of the diocese. According to the teaching of St Paul, he is placed as a leader of the local Church by God Himself³. Pope Gregory VII was deeply conscious of this doctrine and he repeatedly taught it. However, the Pope kept constant watch and continuous vigilance over the behaviour of the local bishops, introducing frequent visits 'ad limina apostolorum'.

2. Cfr. Fliche, A. - Martin V., Histoire de l'Eglise depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, VIII (Paris 1946).

3. Acts 20: 28.

The jurisdiction of the local bishops was limited by the reform Popes also with reference to the religious Orders. Many monasteries thus became exempt from the jurisdiction of the local Ordinaries and were placed under the direct central control of the Pope. In this way the same religious institutions turned out to be very effective instruments in the hands of the Pope for the promotion of reform.

iv. College of cardinals

In the 11th and 12th centuries the role played by the College of Cardinals in the Church achieved unprecedented importance⁴. As the Councillors of the Pope their advisory function reached to such height, at least during the consistories, that the Popes thought they could dispense with the frequent convocation of General Councils. It was during this period, towards the end of the 11th century that the Roman Curia was set up by the Pope as a separate court of his own. This Papal Court was put on a footing of equality with the Germanic-Romance *Curia Regis*.⁵ Its structure, independent of the court of the city of Rome, and entirely dependent upon the Pope who could organize it according to his wishes, helped much in the process of administrative independence and centralization of the Church. The Canonical Laws which were collected or formulated during this period, leading slowly to the publication of the Code of Canon Law in 1917, also gave the Church the structure of a supranational society in which the Pope kept the role of the supreme guardian and interpreter of the ecclesiastical law⁶.

Several other factors can also be cited to show how the centralizing process developed in the first three centuries of this millennium during which the Pope led Western Christianity. Some of these are of a juridical nature such as the restriction of the power of the Bishops, while others are liturgical, such as the introduction of the Roman Rite in Spain, which weakened the importance of the Mozarabic liturgy and brought about closer con-

4. Cfr. *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. I (Cardinal), pp. 259-260.

5. Cfr. Jedin H., *Handbook of Church History* III, 436.

6. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 427.

tact with Rome and greater dependence on it on the part of the Spanish Church⁷.

It must be in all honesty admitted that this process of centralization was not due to the power-hunger of the Popes. They found these measures necessary in order to implement the reforms which were badly needed during those centuries. In order to control many abuses the Popes had often to have recourse to centralizing measures. Such was for instance the case of the canonization of the Saints, which Pope Alexander III (1159 – 1181) reserved to the Apostolic See. The same is applicable to the reservation concerning the granting of indulgences which was to culminate in 1300 in connection with the First Holy Year which Pope Boniface VIII promulgated and which brought legions of Pilgrims to Rome.

v. "Vicar of Christ"

In this connection we should recall that in order to express the claim to universal jurisdiction of the Pope, the title 'Vicar of Christ' began to be reserved exclusively to the Roman Pontiff in the 13th century. The biblical foundation was sought in the words of Christ to St. Peter: "Feed my lambs.... Feed my sheep" (Jn 21: 16–17). As a matter of fact this term existed in ecclesiastical writings already from the 3rd century; but till the 9th century it was used for the emperor, as well as for bishops and Popes. With Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) it became the exclusive papal title. This development was to a great extent, effected by the medieval decretalists and grew out of their treatment of the problem of secular and spiritual power⁸. Obviously in the process of centralization in the Church it played a prominent role.

7. Cfr. Villoslada R. G., *La Reforma gregoriana en Espana; abolicion del rito mozarabe: Historia de la Iglesia Catholica II* (Madrid, 1953), pp. 397–399.

8. Cfr. "Vicar of Christ", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIV, p. 641.

II. Centralization in the century of Catholic Restoration

Another interesting phase in the development of the process of centralization is found in the period corresponding to the counter-reformation or Catholic Restoration which is centred around the Council of Trent and the Tridentine Popes. From the efforts of this restoration there sprang up institutions by which the Popes could direct the activities of the Church, in some cases even in details, during the three following centuries.

1. The Reform of the Church and the Council of Trent

At the beginning of the 16th century the most urgent question was about bringing about a reformation of life in the Church. For some decades the imperative necessity of such a reform had been very keenly felt by every responsible person. An equally urgent need was to take up and defend some doctrinal positions and formulations in the face of the Protestant challenge. In fact if one looks at the Church and the Papacy of the beginning of the 16th century from a completely secular point of view, overlooking the divine assistance that sustains and supports them, it seems impossible that with Popes like Alexander VI (1492–1503), Leo X (1513–1521) and Clement VII (1523–1534) the Papacy could ever take up the leadership of the Church effectively and bring about the long-desired reform and renewal of the Church. And yet history testifies that the reform movement gained momentum and attained its goal only when the Popes, beginning with Pope Paul III (1534–1549) and his timid steps, took over its direction. Here again the Papacy showed its decisive role and unquestionable leadership in turbulent times of crisis in the Church.

The Council of Trent (1545–1563) represents the most important and decisive hour in the 16th century, in the endeavours of the Church to effect internal reform. As the German Church historian Hubert Jedin notes, “the Council of Trent was the answer of the highest teaching authority in the Church to the Protestant reformation. It was likewise the fulfilment of the ever rising demand for an internal renewal of the Church... it gave clear norms to theologians and preachers. It drew doctrinal

boundaries..."⁹. But mere decrees of the Council cannot go very far; they will achieve the desired result only if they are seriously and effectively implemented according to the mind of the Council. Pope Pius IV besides creating a Congregation of Cardinals, August 2, 1564, for the authentic interpretation of the Tridentine Decrees took on himself and his successors the main responsibility of executing the conciliar documents. This strong attitude of the Popes brought along a new development in the exercise of their primacy. As a result of the efficient implementation of the conciliar decrees there came into existence a number of projects and institutions which are termed "Tridentine". Almost all of them contributed in their own ways to the process of centralization during the following centuries. We shall mention a few of them as they were introduced by the Tridentine Popes.

2. i. Pope Pius V (1566–1572)

As the first post-Tridentine Pope, he published documents and books of the highest doctrinal and liturgical importance: a Catechism of the Council of Trent for the Parish Priests (1566), the Roman Breviary (1568), the Roman Missal (1570). The definite doctrinal points and liturgical rites were fixed in these [books and continued to be used almost till the time of Vatican II. Pius V undertook also wide-ranging reforms of the College of Cardinals, the Roman Curia and the Roman Clergy¹⁰.

ii. Pope Gregory XIII (1572–1585)

Though he was not equal to his great predecessor Pius V, the work of reformation that he did is of great and permanent value. He was a learned jurist and highly gifted with initiative and the ability of organization. He brought about the reform of the Julian Calendar which is now known after his name. Because of his personal initiative no less than twenty-three institutions of higher learning were called into existence, the most famous among them being the Gregorian University of Rome. He showed special interest in giving directives for the training and formation of

9. Cfr. Jedin Hubert, *Ecumenical Councils* (London, 1960), p. 183.

10. Cfr. Pastor von Eriherr Ludwig, *History of the Popes*, Vol. XVII (London, 1951), op. 136–240.

candidates to priesthood, since only a learned, disciplined and saintly clergy could carry on reform in the Church. The so-called Tridentine Seminaries took their origin from the encouragement given by this Pontiff. Not being satisfied with giving directives for the training of priests, he founded in Rome, special Colleges for Seminarians from Germany, Hungary, England etc. To foster the union of the Eastern Churches he started in Rome Colleges for the Greeks, Armenians and Maronites. Moreover in the diplomatic representation of the Holy See at Vienna, Paris, Madrid, Lisbon etc. the Pope effected very important changes and thereby strengthened the papal power¹¹.

iii. Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590)

He was the last of the three reform Popes. It has been pointed out that during the Pontificate of Sixtus V the Roman See achieved a degree of ecclesiastical authority and political prestige such as it had not enjoyed for a long time¹². Sixtus V was a born administrator and exhibited remarkable energy and natural ability to govern. Besides establishing order in the Papal States and exterminating the brigandage which was at that time terrorizing all Italy, he replenished the state treasury.

One of his most important administrative reforms was the establishment in January 1588 of fifteen Congregations of Cardinals to carry on all the spiritual and temporal administration of the entire Church, and of the Papal States.¹³ (The Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith which was to serve as an instrument to direct and co-ordinate the missionary activities of the Universal Church, was erected in 1622 only.) These Congregations, in fact, dealt with all the matters that were previously handled in Consistories. It has been noted that "the administrative machinery of the Congregation - in doctrinal as well as in disciplinary matters - covered all spheres so methodically and effectively that regional councils almost fell into oblivion, and

11. Cfr. Karl Bihlmeyer & H. Tüchle, Church History, III, pp. 114-115.

12. Cfr. Ibid. p. 115.

13. Cfr. New Catholic Encyclopedia, XIII, p. 274.

an ecumenical Council was not held again for 300 years after that of Trent'.¹⁴

As a part of his reform Sixtus V insisted on the ad-limina visits of the bishops during which they had to submit a detailed and complete report of the life and activities of their respective dioceses. Residence of Bishops and Pastors was enforced with strictness. On the 3rd of December 1586, by the publication of a Bull, he set a limit of 70 members to the College of Cardinals and promulgated new regulations for them¹⁵. A change was made in this number only by Pope John XXIII. (The reason for limiting the number to 70 is to be found in the pattern of the 70 Elders of Israel, Num. 11: 16.)¹⁶ It is interesting to note that with the establishment of the Congregations the administration of the Church began to grow more centralized. The College of Cardinals began to lose its former importance as one unit and instead the influence of those Cardinals who headed the Congregations began to increase¹⁷.

In order to strengthen the position and influence of the Church and the Papacy, Sixtus V took very important steps also in the field of international diplomacy. He began to send permanent Papal representatives to many countries and establish Nunciatures there. Since the 16th century this diplomatic mission of the Holy See has been a stable and common feature. These representatives are not mere 'Legates a Latere' who are disappearing or the so-called 'Legati nati' which became almost honorific titles but 'Legati missi', who were sent by the Pope wherever his representation was needed and found useful. Owing to this diplomatic mission the influence exerted by the Pope became greater and the norms issued by him for the entire Church and for the relations between the Church and the State extended everywhere with increasing security.¹⁸

14. Cfr. O'Mahony/Dominic & Vithayathil, Church History II (Alwaye, 1974) p. 204.

15. Cfr. NCE, XIII, p. 274.

16. Cfr. Sacramentum Mundi, Vol. I, p. 260.

17. Cfr. Ibid.

18. Cfr. New Catholic Encyclopedia, XIII, p. 274.

Pope Sixtus V was a very vigorous, eminently eloquent and supremely stern personality who devoted himself unsparingly to the defence and advancement of the Church. He was an exceptionally talented, exacting and energetic administrator, very resolute in enforcing public order¹⁹. All these qualities made him bring about a wide degree of centralization in the government of the Church.

III. Centralization in the 19th century

The 19th century is characterized by free-thinking, revolution and industrialization. We might very well say that it was already inaugurated by the French Revolution and reached its climax in the developments that led to World War I. During this era the Church and the Popes had to suffer untold and unprecedented difficulties. We need only think of the humiliations Pius VI (1775-1799) and Pius VII (1800-1823) had to undergo during the hard days of the French Revolution and of Napoleon. This led some people to think that the Church was going to disappear and that the Papacy was nearing its end. But it was not so. The Church has to continue and the Papacy in it, till the end of the world. Christ's promise that the powers of evil would not overtake her (Mt 16:18) proved once more true. The situation in Europe was changed with the downfall of Napoleon. The Congress of Vienna restored the Papal States to the Popes on the 9th of June 1815 and both Catholics and Protestants began to look to the Pope as the guardian of legitimacy and of traditional social order. But there was, all over Europe, also a strong current working against the Church and the Pope since the attitude of the Popes was not in tune with the demands of the modern trend characterized by Pantheism, Rationalism, Secularism, Materialism, Socialism, Communism and so forth.

Though the developments consequent on the French Revolution affected the Church very adversely and she lost power and prestige in the temporal and political fields, she gained very much in moral influence and in effectively developing doctrinal teaching. Free from excessive temporal commitments, the Popes

19. Cfr. Ibid.

were able more effectively to direct her activities for the fulfilment of her prophetic mission and for doctrinal guidance of peoples and nations that were being carried away by rationalism and secularism. The processes of secularization of philosophy and of society itself, which were taking place precisely in countries that were traditionally Christian, threw out an immense challenge to the Church. At this time, in the West the Papacy became more pronouncedly the centre of all ecclesiastical activity than ever. The challenge presented by the 19th century was a doctrinal attack against the very basis of all revelation and faith. To face it the Pope had to exercise his role as Universal Teacher, as was never done before in history. Two examples will show how the Pope confronted this challenge and exercised his role as the Supreme Teacher of the Church.

1. Syllabus

“Syllabus of Errors” is the short version of the title of a document issued together with the Encyclical *‘Quanta Cura’* on the 8th of December 1864, containing errors condemned by Pope Pius IX. The full title of this document is: “A Syllabus containing the most important errors of our time which have been condemned by our Holy Father Pius IX in allocutions, at consistories, in encyclicals and other apostolic letters”²⁰.

The syllabus contained eighty propositions culled from thirty-two documents. It was an unambiguous assertion of the teaching authority of the Church which could not overlook the errors of the Catholic thinkers who were trying to effect a compromise between secularist philosophy and Christian Faith, between liberalism and the Church. In Pius IX's view such a compromise would be disloyalty and treason to Christ who had entrusted His teaching authority to the Church. The primary purpose of this document was served when the bishops and priests throughout Christendom were provided with a definite and practical, if negative, guide to errors, blatant or latent in 19th century thinking. The origin of the Syllabus has been traced to the Provincial Council of Spoleto held in 1849, which requested

20. Cfr. New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIII, p. 854.

Pius IX to draw up a Constitution that would list the principal prevailing errors of the time and condemn them ²¹.

The Syllabus is an excellent expression of the deep-rooted consciousness of the Church and of the Popes in whom the teaching authority of the Church is centred, and who cannot approve of any compromise with those ideologies which raise reason above revelation, nature above supernature, philosophy and natural sciences above theology, and finally the civil state above the Church founded by Christ. The Syllabus was a real check against the rationalistic currents of the 19th century that sought to undermine faith, religion and the Church by extolling reason, philosophy and the civil State. But it was only a preparation to a further detailed teaching of the Church to be given by the Ecumenical Council of Vatican I, in which in the centralized teaching authority of the Church as concretized in the person of the Pope was given the highest and infallible qualification.

2. Vatican I

After a long preparation of five years, a General Council was solemnly inaugurated by the Pope on the 8th of December 1869 in St. Peter's Basilica. Before it was suspended on the 1st of September 1870, owing to political upheavals in Europe and the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, it held four solemn public sessions and eighty-nine general congregations in which about eight hundred Patriarchs, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots and Religious Superiors took part. The achievement of the Council was the promulgation of two doctrinal Constitutions: the one dealing with Faith and Reason and entitled "Dei Filius", promulgated on the 24th of April 1870; and the other on the jurisdictional Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope under the title "Pastor Aeternus", promulgated on the 18th of July 1870, just two months before the army of Victor Emmanuel battered its way to Rome ²².

21. Cfr. Corrigan Raymond, SJ, *The Church and the Nineteenth Century*, (Milwaukee, 1938), p. 177.

22. Cfr. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XIV, pp. 559-560.

The definition, by Vatican I, of the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope was the climax of the centralizing process of the structure of the Church which had been going on in the 2nd millennium. There was a good deal of confusion concerning the exact meaning to be attached to them. This gave rise to much fear and unfounded apprehension among many Catholics, priests and bishops, and especially among theologians and heads of States. This was one of the reasons that a strong group both in and outside the Council vehemently protested against the definition of the dogma of the Primacy and Infallibility, regarding it either as a wrong step or an inopportune action²³. Still at the final voting in the Council during its 4th solemn session on the 18th of July 1870, out of the 535 Council Fathers present 533 voted in favour of the schema, and the doctrine of the jurisdictional Primacy and the Infallibility of the Pope were promulgated dogmas.

Conclusion

From what has been said so far we find that there has been a gradual process of centralization of the structure of the Church, the climax of which was reached in the definitions of Vatican I. The historical developments that brought about this centralization in the structural set-up of the Church during the 2nd millennium could be, and are in fact, interpreted in different ways: for some these developments are symptoms of the power-hunger of the Western Church and of the Popes in particular. But that would be too narrow a generalization of the historical situations and would not do justice in evaluating them. Without overlooking the many shortcomings of the Popes who refer to the possession and exercise of temporal power and administration of the Papal States, and their inability to abolish corruption, simony and nepotism which were rampant in the Church administration during the Middle Ages, it should be admitted in all honesty that the centralizing process in the Church was, above all, intended to preserve the integrity and pristine purity of the faith and the right ordering of the Christian life of the members of the Church. The centralizing activities of the Popes are better understood and explained as the

23. Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 561; also Corigan, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

exercise of their primatial powers in the wider interests of the Church, by reason of the Petrine Office instituted by Christ, of which they are the legitimate possessors. Christ wanted this Office to exist in the Church as the centre of its unity. The exercise of it is a means of achieving and fostering the same unity. But the role of authority which Jesus established in his Church was never for claims of superiority, privileges and temporal glory. It was for real service of the people. Jesus condemned the Apostles when they aimed at precedence, privileges and favours (Mt. 20: 25-28).

The Church cannot be measured by the principles of sociology alone, as the purpose of her external structure is to be an instrument for the salvific action of the Risen Lord through His Spirit, in the relation of the humanity of Jesus to the eternal Word of God in the work of our redemption. As we read in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II, her structure takes the form of "one interlocked reality which comprise divine and human elements. And for this reason, by an excellent analogy, this reality is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who vivifies it by way of building up the body²⁴".

Since the Church is also a community of the people of God characterized by many shortcomings rooted in, and resulting from, human weakness, in spite of the constant divine assistance promised by Christ (Mt. 16: 18), she will always remain subject to reform and change; *Ecclesia semper reformanda*. The unhealthy and authoritarian elements which have got into the Church during the process of centralization should be seen and evaluated from this point of view. Any global criticism, which unfortunately has become the fashion now-a-days in certain circles, of Church administration and of her centralized government will not be justifiable or correspond to historical realities. It is to be remembered that the imbalance of the centralization of power brought about by the definitions of Vatican I was necessitated by

historical conditions, and was not made on purpose, and it has been rectified by Vatican II by its pronouncements on the episcopal collegiality in the government of the universal Church. In fact Vatican II has explicitly stated: "Continuing the task of Vatican I, this Council has decided to declare and proclaim before all men its teaching concerning bishops, the successors of the apostles, who together with the successor of Peter, the vicar of Christ and the visible Head of the whole Church, govern the house of the living God."²⁵

In order to continue to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the world, the Church has to remain open to reform and renewal. Only through change can the Church preserve, and continue to communicate, God's salvation to humanity at large. The identity of the Church is not to be sought in her continued unchanged existence but in her ever-growing ability to change under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and adjust herself better and better to the changing world which she is in, to unite to God the world. The Church, in spite of the changes which history makes her undergo in her structure, whether centralization or its opposite, will always remain what she is as long as she cannot fail in fidelity to the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Why the powers of the under-world will not prevail against the Church is to be explained from the fact that the indefectible fidelity of the Church to God is guaranteed to her by Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In spite of human weakness, the Church as the possessor of the Holy Spirit, cannot totally turn out to be unfaithful to God. Every change, reform and renewal in the Church, therefore, is an additional attempt towards greater fidelity to God, whether its form, conditioned by the needs of the time, is one of centralization or decentralization. Hence both the centralized and decentralized structure of the Church can be, and is, as long as in it the true freedom of the children of God is preserved and guaranteed, a genuine sign and true expression of her authentic nature as a sign lifted in the world for the salvation of all mankind - the Universal Sacrament of Salvation.²⁶

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25. L. G. no. 18

26. L. G. nos. 1 & 48.

The Process of Decentralization in the Church

The Church is a complex reality sharing in the dualism of the Word Incarnate. She is divine and human, local and universal, particular and catholic, transcending social and political limitations but at the same time quietly adapting herself to the dominant socio-political patterns of each age. From the time of the Emperor Constantine through the Byzantine and Carolingian periods the Catholic Church slowly and gradually assumed the administrative pattern of a world-wide empire drawing heavily on the legal genius of the Romans. After the tragic break-up of Christendom at the time of the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation set in motion an increasingly centralizing trend reinforced by the political patterns of the colonial powers of the West that built up empires over which the sun never set. Today with the sudden liberation of colonies, dominions and subjugated countries, and the disappearance of imperial powers, the over-centralized socio-political administrative set-up has become irrelevant. Hence the Church, which always recognizes the will of God in the signs of the times, has initiated in Vatican Council II, a process of decentralization which has certain serious implications for Christian life in general and for the task of the Church in the world in particular.

The Church and socio-political patterns

One fundamental fact of faith is that the Church is a supernatural reality standing above the passing structures of politics. She is founded on the mission of the Son by the Father, the mission entrusted to the Church in the Spirit. It is the community of the free children of God for whom freedom is primarily an internal gift given by the Spirit,² and not by external socio-political conventions. Hence the reality of the Church

1. *Jn.* 20, 21.

2. *2 Cor.* 3, 17.

as a community of faith and love, tending to final fulfilment in God through hope, endures even under the most stringent external limitations.

On the other hand, the Church is the People of God, the community of men who are social beings. Whatever be their tasks and life, they face political problems, that touch their cohesion and unity in the community. Political structure, therefore, in a wider sense, as "the sum total of the activities which have for their object exercise of power, and therefore also the conquest and conservation of power and also the distribution of that power" cannot be excluded from the existential reality of the Church. Though one may say that where love and charity rule there is no question of power, the very "will to be together" requires organization and assignment of roles. The very phenomenon of centralization of power in the Church arose from her political reality. The manner of being together demands a certain amount of conformity from the members, and naturally there comes a certain collective imperialism, a tendency to extend influence and power to control more and more the activities outside it. A distortion of perspective also naturally comes about, since the attention shifts from the primary task of ministering to the salvation to all men in a self-effacing service, to the question of survival against challenging forces, requiring formal conformity to the socio-political structure.³ Hence the Church has to be constantly on her guard against the dominant influence of the political phenomenon that can make her an autocratic and over-centralized institution, that will stifle her message of freedom.

Besides, the Church cannot accomplish her task with a framework and a mode of communitarian action that were relevant to a past age, but are inadequate for today. Only with reference to the cultural models surrounding her can she deliver her message. She must speak the language of men today, build upon their values which she animates, and define herself, starting from the horizon that constitutes their social and spiritual context. This is particularly true in the present situation in which

3. cf. P. Eyt. "L' Élément politique dans les structure Ecclesiale" *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* (NRT) 92 (1970) 3-25.

the basic principles and values of democracy like free speech, equality, fraternity, responsibility of the individual and ideal service to others are all drawn from the essential Christian message. The Church is the eschatological community in which freedom and true fellowship are realized. Christian fraternity stresses the equality of all men and opposes all kinds of personality cults. It also recognizes the multiplicity of functions and charisms in the community.⁴

Principles of decentralization

The need for decentralization in the Church is suggested from different aspects of her existence and different principles arising out of them:

The principle of subsidiarity

The most general principle suggesting decentralization is that of subsidiarity, drawn from the socio-political field. In the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* Pope Pius XI, who calls it the "supremely important principle of social philosophy", defines it as follows: "Just as it is wrong to withdraw from the individual and commit to the community at large what private enterprise and endeavour can accomplish, so it is likewise unjust and a gravely harmful disturbance of right order to turn over to a greater society of higher rank functions and services which can be performed by lesser bodies on a lower plane. For, a social undertaking of any sort by its very nature, ought to aid the members of the body social, but never to destroy and absorb them."⁵ The idea is that each decision must be taken and each function performed at the lowest level of appropriate competence. What can be adequately and responsibly done at a lower level should not be reserved to a higher authority. In the past this principle has been applied to the State in its services to the public so that it may not stifle all private initiative, and to the

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4. Rudolf Pesch. "New Testament Foundations of Democratic Form of Life in the Church." *Concilium* vol. 3, n. 7 (1971) pp. 48-59/
 5. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 23 (1931) p. 203 quoted by Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* AAS 53 (1961) p. 414.

international community with regard to individual nations. This is applicable to the Church also inasmuch as it shares in the socio-political structure. What can be efficiently done by a parish community should not be taken over or reserved to the bishop. Similarly legislation on the regional and universal planes should only strengthen and safeguard the identity and self-sufficiency of the particular church gathered round the Eucharistic table under the leadership of its bishop, and facilitate its communion with all the other churches.

The new view of man

The general principle of subsidiarity is reinforced today by the special view of man that has come into prominence with the two World Wars and the philosophies of Existentialism and Personalism that gained popularity in the post-war situation. Renaissance Humanism and Rationalism speculated on the universal man, the citizen of the world. But the present new philosophies place the emphasis on the situated man, with his individual context. The individual is not isolated, but conditioned both from within and from without, by the *milieu*, the psychological data and other facts that make men dependent on each other. Men are neither interchangeable nor independent of their social and historical context.⁶ What may be valid and relevant for people in a particular situation may not be applicable in another. The groupings of men according to place and culture have a specific reality from which the Church can abstract herself only at her peril. A remote authority lacking the immediate experience of the actual situation may not naturally be responsive enough to the Spirit working within the hearts of people and calling to the Church from concrete situations.

The Church as an event

The New Testament idea of the Church gives emphasis to this situated view of man. The Church originated as an event in the individual community of the disciples of Christ who were immediate witnesses of his death and resurrection, and recipients of the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. When the Apostles carried that experience to other communities their preaching of

6. George Burdeau. *La démocratie*, Paris: Seuil, 1956, p. 91.

the Good News became fresh events and the one Gospel took individual shape differently according to different religio-social contexts and local needs. The real Church of Christ had to be made present anew in each of them.

A parish may be a community in this sense but is not necessarily so. Several parishes in a city may present the same local conditions and needs and may constitute one community. On the other hand, within the territorial confines of a parish there may be several communities like a university, a factory or a hospital. These may call for different realizations of the same ecclesial reality. To press them all into conformity in the same mould and pattern may cause serious damage to the freshness of the Gospel. To be close to men and women of different situations of our complex society today, the structure of the particular community must be flexible enough to provide each one with sufficient autonomy for self-realization.

Here there appears to be a difference of approach to the reality of the Church between the Oriental and Occidental traditions. Just as the Orientals affirm first the distinct personalities of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and then proceed to the affirmation of their consubstantiality in the Trinity, so also regarding the Church they affirm first the distinct particular Churches as full realizations of the mystery of Christ's salvation and then proceed to the universal Church as the community and communion of all the Churches. The Latins, on the other hand, affirm unity first and then proceed to the distinction both in the Trinity and in the Catholic Church, as processes within the unity. From a realistic approach to the fullness of the Christian mystery in the individual Church the Syrian Fathers loved to repeat that the particular church, small and shabby though it be, was the Catholic Church. Baptized in it and incorporated in the local body of people individuals become members of the universal Church. As St. Ephrem states in one of his inimitable poems, the heavenly dove sent by the Father mixes himself with the people of that particular community and enables them to rise to heaven supported on his golden wings. This presence of the Holy Spirit in the local community makes it really the Body of Christ, organically open to other Churches. A split in the local community rends the seamless garment of Christ.

These individual communities are not static, or closed or sectarian units. They are individual realizations of the total reality of the Church, the Body of Christ, and as such are open to the entire Church, a living organism the life of which is found fully in every part of it and totally in the whole. Each individual community will be "a group of people who accept the Christian revelation and believe in Jesus Christ, but also know that this faith in Jesus is also dependent on other believers."⁷ These individual communities will naturally be pluriform in their orientation to the particular situation, some progressively inclined, some conservative. But they all will have their central point in their regular meeting to celebrate the Eucharist, the universal banquet of salvation. Their diversity will come from their effort to realize this redemptive sacrifice in the service of the actual community through the multiplicity of functions, and charisms of individual members and of communities⁸, that further the welfare, unanimity and peace of the community and build it up from within as Christ's Body and show forth its concern for the people outside it.⁹

In this vision of Christian communities as ever continuing events, "making present and real of the Church as such"¹⁰ canon law and external control from a remote central authority will have a totally different meaning and function from that of the organizational set-up of a civil society. The State attains the unity and orientation towards the common welfare mostly by external control, police and law courts, threats of punishment and curtailment of liberties and privileges. In civil society power is a basic concept and authority rules with the intention of maintaining itself in a privileged position and of increasing its power. Only in this way may the common welfare of society be realized. On the other hand, in the fellowship of Christians basically built on organic incorporation in Christ and reinforced by the unifying

7. Norbert Greinacher. "A Community Free of Rule" *Concilium*. vol. 3, n. 7 (1971) 87-107.

8. cf. *I Cor.* 12, 28; *Rom.* 12, 4 f.

9. *I Cor.* cc. 13 & 14.

10. W. Kasper. "Kirche und Gemeinde" *Der Seelsorger* 38 (1968) 387-93. p. 389.

activity of the Spirit external government must be subordinated to the law of charity written in the hearts of people. Indeed, a rational exercise of power "inherent to every division of labour that forms society, derived from the ability and confined to the administration of the function and institutions that are necessary for the progress of the whole"¹¹ is necessary in the Church also. But it never lords it over others or aims at the perpetuation of the external structure. Because it is basically there to serve the salvation of persons consciously and willingly dedicating themselves to Christ. Canon Law can never assume the pattern of the civil and criminal procedure codes of a secular government. To impose legislation from an arbitrary conception of authority or to execute it without giving sufficient facilities for the people to understand and appreciate its meaning and function and to demand its observance merely with the pressures of mortal sin and excommunication imply a misunderstanding of the reality of the Church. Ecclesial law must take only a second place subordinate to the theological understanding of faith that will prepare the minds for willing obedience to God's revelation. It must have primarily in view the proper proclamation of God's word in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.

Centripetal and centrifugal forces in the Church

What militates against a uniform and centralized form of Church government is the complex nature of the ecclesial reality. The Church is catholic and yet realized in particular communities; she is universal but has come down to us in individual historical traditions, and she carries in herself the polarities of local churches.

Catholicity and particularity

The word 'catholic' is today understood in a special sense. It is an intensive catholicity and indicates a reality organically one embracing all men and all that is authentically human in every nation, every culture and every man. Christ is the authentic man, the summary of human history. By his saving sacri-

11. H. Marcuse. *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt, 1970. p. 41.

fice he has redeemed humanity as a whole. By his resurrection he is designated and constituted the Son of God¹² incorporating everything under his headship.¹⁴ With him all men have, in a sense, risen from death and sin, though individual men will have to attain the realization of that victory, slowly in the course of history, filling up, by their sufferings as members, what is wanting in the satisfaction of the head. By the acceptance of his redemptive work in the Resurrection, the Father has accepted all that is authentically human. Though Christ's humanity was created particular and time-space bound, its assumption as the conjoint instrument of salvation of the World, the whole religious history of humanity has gained an organic unity, forming a single economy of salvation. So the Church is catholic with a centripetal dynamism drawing all men and everything authentically human to its organic vitality in the Spirit.

Particularity is a concept that corresponds to this catholicity. The organically whole and one Church does not subsist in the abstract but is realized in every particular Church, gathered round an altar at the salvific sacrificial banquet of the Eucharist under the leadership of a Bishop. The Eucharist, the Body of Christ, is the focal point of the Church. Without the Eucharist there is no Church; the Church is the community of the disciples gathered round the family table of the altar. Though it is the Church that celebrates the Mass it is the Mass that makes the Church. All the other Sacraments flow from, and have their centre in, the Body of the Lord. The bishop stands for the fullness of the priesthood. He not only offers the Eucharist in the name of the people and administers the sacraments to them, but can also ordain others in the same priesthood and commit to them the same priestly functions. A particular church is fully self-sufficient, since it has everything that the Church is. It communicates to its members its treasures and proclaims God's saving message to the world. Hence, it must have its own autonomy to regulate and order the ministry of salvation within itself.

But a particular church is not a closed entity. Precisely because it is a concrete realization of the catholic organism of the one Church it is open to other churches, and especially to

12. *Rom.* 1, 3.

13. *Eph.* 1, 9.

those fundamental factors that make the Church organically one. The factors are the unity of faith and communion, the collegiality of Bishops, and the pre-eminence and supremacy of the Bishop of Rome. A particular church is not a self-contained and isolated entity. If it departs from the orthodoxy of faith and harbours division within itself and opposition to other churches it can no longer claim to be the authentic Church of Christ. Similarly the collegiality of the Church as an active communion of the disciples of Christ and the collegiality of all the bishops as successors to the apostolic college, demand the total openness of the particular church to the catholic Church.

The Pope, the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Peter, has a special unifying function in the whole Church and every part of it. Obedience to his supreme authority is the necessary link of a particular church with the authentic Church of Christ.¹⁴ On the other hand, his singular and proper prerogative of supremacy is also a guarantee that the particular church will be able to preserve its autonomy and initiative and will not be absorbed in an anonymous bureaucratic organism under the tyranny of

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14. G. Thils. "La théologie de la primauté" *Revue théologique de Louvain* 3 (1972) 22-39. The authority of the Pope is defined in Vatican I as "full, supreme, universal, ordinary, immediate and episcopal". Here "ordinary" means "attached to the office", "by reason of his office" as opposed to "delegated", but does not mean "habitual" as is the pastoral charge of the Bishop in his diocese. The power of the Pope is not restricted in any way, except by the natural and divine law, the purpose intended by Christ in instituting the primacy of Peter. This scope is clearly indicated in the dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus*: "In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, and that the whole multitude of believers might be preserved in unity of faith and communion by means of a closely united priesthood." This special purpose of the Papal supremacy shows that it does not come into conflict with the authority of the Bishop of a particular church.

local opinion and worldly pressures.¹⁵ Communion with the Bishop of Rome and the College of Bishops is also the source of the apostolicity of a particular church. Its Bishop gets his apostolic succession by designation and consecration by bishops from outside his own see. No Bishop can appoint his own successor.

Universality and individuality

If catholicity and particularity indicate the centripetal force in the Church, her universal character which seeks to go to all men spread out in space and time, and the individuality of historical traditions, stand for a centrifugal movement. Universality indicates a reality extended everywhere. The Church has the mission of evangelizing all nations and making disciples of all men. This is her catholicity taken in an extensive sense, demanding that she identify herself with every nation and every culture.

The Church does not exist as an abstract and universal reality. What exist are individual churches, with traditions that obtained their individuality and identity through long centuries of historical growth. The different liturgical traditions in the Church, Roman, Byzantine, Antiochean, Chaldean, Coptic show the pluriform growth of the church in history. Vatican Council II has clearly indicated the centripetal and centrifugal dimensions of the Church in this respect: "That Church, holy and catholic, which is the Mystical Body of Christ is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit through the same faith, the same sacraments, and the same government, and who combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or rites"¹⁶. Though these various individual churches form one organic unity by the collegiality of Bishops and by communion with the Bishop of Rome, they legitimately and purposefully retain their identity and autonomy. They are "of equal dignity, so that none of them is superior to the others by reason of rite. They enjoy the same rights and are under the

15. cf. De Lubac. "*Les Eglise Particulieres dans l'Eglise Universelle*, Paris: Aubier, 1971, p. 116; Card. P. Garrone. *L'Eglise*: Paris, 1972, p. 173.

16. "Orientalium Ecclesiarum" n. 2.

same obligations, even with respect to preaching the gospel to the whole world" ¹⁷.

This decentralization of the Church into individual churches is not a grudging concession to historical pressures, but something integral to the human and historical reality of the Church existing in spatio-temporal conditions. As has already been noted above, the Christian message was not communicated as an abstract doctrine but as a concrete experience. Even the Evangelists "wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing reducing some of them to a synthesis, explicating some-things in view of the situation of their Churches" ¹⁸. Hence the Gospel message took shape in each individual church as a concrete tradition, faith, worship, practice and theological reflection forming an integral whole. Once the individuality of a church was formed in isolation from others later interaction with them did not eliminate its individuality but only helped it to grow and assimilate new aspects and new ideas. The individuality and distinct identity of churches, their distinctive liturgical traditions and theological patrimony are what constitute the historical reality of the Church. Though these different traditions may draw closer and closer in a world that is eliminating cultural barriers through the communications explosion, still to ignore the existing diversity or to eliminate the difference by an arbitrary decision would do violence to the concrete historical past of the Church.

Besides, these different patterns of understanding and self-expression of the individual churches are needed for the growth of the Church. Struggling to give human expression to the inexpressible mystery of God, she can profit from any number of distinct patterns of human thought and worship. As I. H. Dalmias O. P. says, the Church "will always bear the mark and the burden of the cultures in which she has her roots. Because of this she never expresses distinctly more than one aspect of the mysterious fullness to which she bears witness and there can never be too great a variety of rites, varying with the diversity

17. *Ibid* n. 3.

18. "Dei Verbum" n. 19.

of human cultures and historical periods, effectively to emphasize the many aspects of a mystery surpassing our understanding"¹⁹. Father Dalmais complains that the theological value of this diversity of rites has not always been perceived because these different rites were considered in their purely human aspect, or looked upon with a preconceived theological idea²⁰. The centrifugal trend in individual churches belongs to the limited and time-bound reality of the Church. The universal Church stands to gain from the variety of the independent individual churches. To order, organize and regulate the different individual traditions from a centralized agency would be an impossible task and would defeat their scope and role.

Even in the case of individual churches that have retained very little of their original identity on account of later heavy borrowings from, and assimilation to, other traditions, their individual growth must be safeguarded. The effort to go back to an antiquity and eliminate all that has been borrowed and assimilated from elsewhere may not be possible or worthwhile. Simply going back to the past may be sheer archeologism, not fully in tune with the law of divine revelation, which moves ahead in history with a consciousness of the needs of the present and of the call of the future. Apart from this, the mere geographical individuality of a church that traces its origin and tradition from a holy messenger of Christ, especially if he was an immediate disciple of Christ, is a positive value that must be honoured.

The local church

The local church presents a peculiar phenomenon that combines the centripetal and centrifugal forces. The local unity of the Church is constituted by the socio-cultural and political factors that present the same challenges and problems to the People of God, as the Church existing in a particular nation or geographical region, or having historically the same cultural

19. I. H. Dalmais O. P. "The Liturgy 'Action of the Church' ". *Mission and Witness*, ed. Patrick Burns S. J. London, Chapman, 1965 pp. 347-360. sp. p. 356.

0. *Ibid.*

heritage. The unity of the catholic and universal Church does not immediately say anything about the socio-cultural forms she should take or the actual manner in which she has to realize herself. These forms and modes depend very much upon the social and political conditions in which the people live²¹. Hence, a local church may consist of one or more individual traditions and one or more particular churches, who has her own internal principles of unity, and hence stands for centrifugal units within the socio-cultural or political unity²². Still, the collegiality of the People of God demands close collaboration too, and regional or national Conferences of Bishops give concrete expression to the unity of the local church. Though these Episcopal Conferences cannot be taken as miniature realizations of the universal college of Bishops that stands for the one catholic church as the symbol of its bond of unity and charity, still, they too are expressions of the collegial character of the Church. The local church cannot infringe the inner unity and autonomy of the particular or individual church or come as an intermediary between it and the Bishop of Rome, who as the successor of Peter has a singular and proper prerogative to minister to the unity of all the Churches and to safeguard the identity of individual and particular ones²³. The catholicity of the Church that makes the Pope the sign of its unity, at the same time excludes on the one hand the force of uniformity which attempts to impose a particular form on all, and on the other, the closed outlook that tends to isolate any one church from the others and from the universal Church.

Decentralization and the magisterium

A very delicate area where this process of decentralization meets with a certain amount of difficulty is that of doctrine and the exercise of teaching authority. Unity of the Church demands unity of faith and the teaching authority of the church known as the Magisterium has a special responsibility to maintain the purity of doctrine against errors and heresies that insidiously

21. R. Boucher. "Au service de l' unité" *vocation*, n. 257 (Jan. 1972) p. 104.

22. De Lubac. *I. c.* p. 48.

23. De Lubac. *Ibid.* p. 116; Card. Garrone, *I. c.* p. 173.

spread among a body of men scattered over the face of the globe. But this apostolic function of teaching is generally and immediately exercised in the intimacy of the particular Church by the Bishop who maintains communion with other Bishops and especially with the Pope. This is an integral part of the worship the whole Church pays to God in the obedience of faith. The protestant Reformation which appeared as a revolt of the masses against the Magisterium was a real shock, and it brought in an authoritarian reaction against the teaching authority. Exercise of the magisterial authority took on the appearance of something exterior and external to personal life. In the centuries following the Council of Trent there came about an ever-increasing formalization of the principle of authority as if it were something absolute, carrying in itself its own justification. Several movements which arose after the Reformation like Naturalism, Rationalism and Fideism, made the ordinary layman who was very active in them, suspect in the eyes of the official teaching authority. Hence there was a reinforcement and a centralization of the doctrinal vigilance, taking on a more and more authoritarian character and the aspect of a jealous surveillance. The councils of Trent and Vatican I which were directed principally against prevalent errors of the times only helped to emphasize this watch-dog attitude on the part of the Magisterium. Since this brought about an exaggerated insistence on formulas, which were taken as absolute and irreformable, it produced an effect directly opposed to what was intended: instead of aiding the act of faith, it polarised opinions on account of a preoccupation with formulas, and made people lose sight of the content of revelation. These formulas proposed in concrete situations did not have actual relevance to others and other cultural worlds, so they led to a certain "inflation" of the dogmatic form. Some have called this over-insistence on formulas an ecclesial monophysitism, since it confuses the word of the Church which has an inevitably human and relative aspect, with the immediately divine word, which alone has absolute authority in every respect ²⁴.

24. B. Sesboué. "Autorité du Magistère et Vie de Foi Ecclesiale" *N.R.T.* 93 (1971) 337-362.

This wrong impression concerning the teaching authority of the Church was further compounded by the collection of magisterial documents generally known under the name of its original compiler, Denzinger, which remained a text book in Catholic theological seminaries for over a century. As Yves Congar O. P. has put it, the mechanical way it was used produced in the minds of those who used it an impression that there is, over men who try to think and express themselves, a unique superperson called Magisterium, watching, scolding, and correcting them and determining what they are permitted and not permitted to hold.²⁵

The ecumenical Council Vatican II has initiated a clear departure from this highly centralized view of the teaching authority of the Church. Though the Council was the highest teaching authority it was a celebration of the faith of the Church in which she was wholly, in some manner, involved. Instead of aiming at categorical definitions of doctrine and condemnation of particular heresies and errors it showed the wealth and variety of faith that has to be realized in the concrete socio-cultural situations which the Church faces in different parts of the world today. The Fathers of the Council have clearly evinced, in the council documents, their awareness of the distance between the vision of faith and the formulations that are restricted by the terminology employed and the particular philosophies implied.

The great ecclesial event of the Council was an invitation to the People of God to continue listening to God's revelation in history through the Word. If the Church is the community of those who reverently listen to the word and confidently announce it to the world, the particular churches spread over the face of the globe cannot remain tied to the cue cards provided by a central authority. Theology is the organized reflection of the Christians on their faith in Jesus Christ and their Christian experience in definite contexts of time, place and culture. According to the promise of the Saviour, the People of God are preserved infallible and indefectible in their pilgrimage in faith. The infallibility of the hierarchical organs of the Church is ministerial in function with regard to that fundamental infallibility.

25. *Ibid.*

Decentralization in liturgy

The harmful effects of over-centralization are most of all felt in the area of liturgy. In the beginning the prayers of the Church at liturgical celebrations were mostly improvised by the participants under the direction of the presiding bishop. But when errors began to creep in and the basic nature of liturgical worship was confused, there appeared everywhere the positive ruling that "those who wanted to use prayers taken from elsewhere, should first get the approval of competent persons."²⁶ Later this 'approval of competent persons' was changed into that of the Bishops of the region. But even at that early period Rome showed a centralizing tendency. Pope Innocent I demanded strict conformity and ruled that "the priests of the Lord should not introduce any diversity or variety in the ordinations and consecrations, so that the ecclesiastical arrangements handed down by the Apostles may be integrally preserved."²⁷ The Council of Trent unified the liturgy of Rome and forbade all changes at diocesan and regional levels. Later, when the Eastern Churches came into communion with Rome, there was a tendency on their part to exercise the same control over their liturgies.

This centralized control over the liturgy had in fact effects quite opposite to those intended. Instead of being the ordered

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26. Council of Carthage in 397. can. 21. *Mansi* VII, 1762, col. 643 cf. M. Vos "A la recherche de normes pour les textes liturgiques de la messe (Ve-VIIIe Siecles), *Revue d'Histoire Eccl.* 69 (1974) 5-37.
 27. M. Vos. "Normes pour less prieres de la messe" l. c. p. 12. But Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) did not think in the same way. Writing to Augustine of Canterbury, who was attached to the Roman tradition, he advised him to give to the English people its own proper liturgy with elements taken from Rome, Gaul and elsewhere. "Cum una sit fides, sunt ecclesiarum diversae consuetudines, et aliter consuetudo missarum in Romana ecclesia atque aliter in Galliarum ecclesiis tenetur.... Non enim pro locis res, sed pro bonis rebus loca nobis amanda sunt. Ex singulis ergo quibusque ecclesiis, quae piam regulam servam quae recta sunt eligat, et haec quasi in vasculis collecta apud Anglorum ecclesiam in consuetudine depone." cited *Ibid.* p. 15.

cult of the whole people it became, in reality, very much a clerical affair. It was conceived as the official, public expression of the Church's worship, performed formally by the official representatives. What was needed was the formal external performance of the rites with rubrical exactitude. The people were mere on-lookers. In the Orient, by the year 600 A. D. the liturgical celebration was taken behind the iconostasis or the sanctuary curtain "away from the gaze of the common people".²⁸ In the West the change came by 1000 A. D., when the altar was placed against the wall, and the priest with his back to the people began to mutter inaudibly the unintelligible Latin canon. The central point of the Christian liturgy is the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ and of his unique mediatorship between God and men. But with the Trinitarian and Christological controversies and the preoccupation of the central authority of the Church with fighting heresies and preserving doctrinal purity the focus of attention in liturgy also was shifted to the Trinity of God and the divinity of Christ. This took place first in the Orient where the controversies had their immediate impact. The Resurrection of Christ and his mediatorship were lost sight of, and "Christ our God" became the central theme. In the West attention shifted also to the sentimental side, the concrete humanity of Christ, his life, sufferings and death. Christmas overshadowed Easter. Sunday instead of being the feast of Christ's Resurrection became the feast of the Trinity; the Trinitarian preface became the Sunday preface in 1759. Devotion to the Trinity

28. cf. "An Exposition of the Mysteries" Homily XVII (A) wrongly attributed to Narsai: "The Church performs her Mysteries in secret away from those that are without; and the priest celebrates privately within the sanctuary." *The Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, trs. and ed. J. Armitage Robinson, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1909, p. 2. This probably belongs to the end of the 6th century. But in the earlier authentic homily of Narsai this ideal is set forth: "Look steadfastly at the bread and wine that are upon the table, which the power of the Spirit changes into the Body and Blood. See the outward things with the outward senses of your members and depict things hidden by the hidden faculties of your minds." Hom. Lit. XXI, *Ibid.* p. 56.

itself lost all proper perspective and became devotion to individual Persons. The liturgical year was divided into three units, Christmas for the Father, Easter for Christ, and Pentecost for the Holy Spirit.²⁹ But, what was lost in the official liturgy was made good in private devotions which allowed free play to human feelings, the rosary, benediction, the way of the cross and the like. As Jungmann says, "a gap widened between liturgical prayer and popular devotions, since it was difficult for new devotions to get into official prayer, and so much of the power of the liturgy to form popular prayer was lost. The people lost sight of the fact that the priest was the director of the congregational prayer and that he should gather up their prayers in an appropriate 'collect'." ³⁰

Here again Vatican II has given the green light for decentralization. Though no individual person, not even a priest "may add, remove or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority," the Bishop and the competent bodies of bishops are given appropriate functions in the regulation of the liturgy.³¹ Liturgy is considered the focus of the particular Church. "In any community existing around an altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is manifested a symbol of that charity and 'unity of the Mystical Body' without which there can be no salvation." It is also recognized that when there is present in a place a distinct community of another rite, the constitution of a distinct particular church is called for.³² The traditional autonomy of the Oriental Churches in liturgical matters is fully recognized. The general principle is laid down: "these (lawful liturgical rites) should not be altered except by way of an appropriate and organic development."³⁴

29. Joseph A. Jungmann S. J. *The Good News and its Proclamation*, Manila, pp. 10–15.

30. *Ibid* p. 14.

31. "Sacram Liturgiam" n. 22.

32. "Lumen Gentium" n. 26.

33. "Christus Dominus" n. 23, 3.

34. "Orientalium Ecclesiarum" n. 6; cf. n. 19.

That the liturgical celebration is not a mere mechanical repetition by rote of certain official prayers, but requires regulation and direction in the concrete situation of the community is also clearly acknowledged. Every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is regulated by the bishop to whom is committed the office of offering the worship of the Christian religion.³⁵ This duty of regulating the actual celebration of the liturgy definitely applies also to the one who presides over it in the name of the Bishop.³⁶

Liturgy is not a mere external demonstration, but the action making actual the reality and the life of the Church. Nothing is less exterior than it, but all external elements in man's being are taken up in the liturgy. It is action: from the moment a liturgical function begins all are enacting the service of God. Hence Liturgy is not primarily a form of instruction. The liturgical text and the set prayers though important do not constitute the liturgy. They become the liturgy only when they are made use of and set in action. Hence they cannot be made use of mechanically like magical formulas. They have to take actual living form in the celebration of living persons. Less still are the ceremonies and rubrics of the liturgy; as media for its performance they become liturgy only when performed at the right time for the right purpose. Hence though it is the same redemptive work of the risen Saviour that is performed every celebration of the liturgy has its distinctive individuality, both from the mark and burden of the cultures in which the particular or individual church has her roots and from the socio-cultural and historical situation she is facing here and now.

Conclusion

Though she is the Body of Christ and the sign and sacrament of man's union with God, the church is, all the same, a human phenomenon. She has all the dynamics of a human communitarian group. Power and distribution of the privileges of power imply the phenomena of centralization and decentralization. Vatican Council II has closed a long era of increasing

35. "Lumen Gentium" n. 26.

36. "Sacram Liturg." n. 42.

centralization in the Church and apparently initiated a new age of healthy decentralization. This demands greater responsibility and more active involvement on the part of the particular and individual churches and their local groupings in the realization of the message of Christ in the world. The Church is not a merely external political organization that has to attain its goals by the rule of coercive law, police and law courts. It governs by the law of charity that moves people from within. In this approach there will not be universal uniformity of arrangements, but a healthy diversity, pluriformity and flexibility of organizational structures according to the actual conditions of particular churches, their individual traditions, and socio-political realities. One needs to have always in view the catholicity of the universal college of Bishops.

The unity of faith will not consist in repeating the same stereotyped formulas in every situation, but rather in reflecting upon and contextualizing the faith in the actual life situations proclaiming the one message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Unity of worship will not consist merely in performing the same ceremonies, following the same rubrics and repeating the same prayers everywhere but in celebrating the one saving sacrificial Banquet of the risen and living Christ under the prudent direction of the Bishops who are one with their people and in communion with all the other churches and with the Pope. This kind of decentralization will in no way affect the unity of the Church, but will bring about healthy diversity and pluriformity that will add to the inner unity and vitality of the Church.

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Book Review

IMAGES OF MAN – a philosophical and scientific inquiry.
T. M. Thomas and John B. Chethimattam, Bangalore: Dharmaram
Publications, 1974, pp. vii, 243. Rs. 15/-

This book is a valuable and stimulating contribution to the discussion of man's understanding of himself. The authors themselves regard the understanding of man as important for the fulfilment of the basic concerns of education, namely to help man "to become a unique, free, responsible human being and to create a better world by constructive social change." Educators as well as students will find the book most rewarding, particularly because of the wealth of information and knowledge it contains relating to different branches of learning such as philosophy, religion, psychology, sociology and science and the attempt of the authors to be as balanced and unbiased as possible.

The book is presented in three parts, Man's search for himself in the past, Contemporary Approaches to Man, and Towards a new Synthesis. In part I dealing with a historical survey, different chapters are devoted to Religion and Philosophy in general; Indian Philosophy, Chinese Philosophy, Greek Philosophy and the Judeo Christian tradition. In all the chapters the attempt is to expound the positive contribution of our understanding of the meaning of man, rather than to offer negative criticism. The manner of presentation of the information and the insights of interpretation are themselves an important contribution to education.

Part II deals with modern interpretation in science, evolutionary theories, Marxism, Psychology, Technology and in the philosophies reflecting the "Age of Anxiety".

Part III is an attempt at synthesis and deals with some of the issues for man's self-understanding, namely, Self and Personality, the Quest for Community, Freedom, Universal Humanity, the Educated Man and Education for a New Man.

Where necessary the authors offer criticisms. For example they refer to the weakness of psychologists who are parochial in their outlook and do not try to gain what they can from different views. They suggest that "the psychological view of man will be enriched by admitting both the analytical approach, now emphasised by behaviourists, and the synthetic approach now followed by humanistic psychology." (p. 129) Similarly they warn us against wrong attitudes produced by technology associated with materialistic, Machine, consumer and military orientations.

By a systematic presentation of facts, views and interpretations the authors help to focus attention on the goals and issues relevant to education in India today. They rightly point out that today "education cannot be left to the responsibility of the family or particular religious institutions as in the past, but must be primarily the concern of the States and other public bodies. In this manner the whole Society is involved in its own development and in the projection of a new image for man and human community" (p. 237). The main thrust of the book is the insight that man is not just an individual shaping his own destiny but essentially a community shaped by his openness to the transcendent ultimate Reality.

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